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a riotous travesty of time to come by

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a novelet of space flight by
ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS



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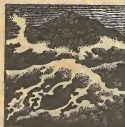
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THRILLING WONDER STORIES

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A Complete Novel

THE CONTINENT MAKERS

By L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

Sober-sided scientist Gordon Graham suddenly finds himself sadly at sea when his strange romance in space is swamped by a tidal wave!

9

Two Novelets

THE VOID BEYOND.....Robert Moore Williams 72

Space-travel was strictly stag till Dr. Frances Marion took steps to cure the malady that confined women to Mother Earth!

MILORDS METHUSELAH.....Carter Sprague 92

A space flyer, a scientist and a girl sociologist become a trio of Demigods on an amazing planet where time is twisted!

Five Short Stories

THE REPLACED.....Margaret St. Clair 67

Old age can be irksome even on an artificial asteroid

OVERTIME.....Mack Reynolds 111

The beat of a metronome sets the course of a space ship

I'M A STRANGER, MYSELF.....Dallas Ross 122

"Howdy," said the rube to the Martian. "Having trouble, brother?"

THE FIRST LONG JOURNEY.....Raymond Z. Gallun 125

It was like being sentenced to an unimaginable solitary confinement

DECEPTION.....Matt Lee 134

Pinup girls in three dimensions, stir up man's delights and tensions

Features

THE READER SPEAKS.....The Editor 6

THE FRYING PAN.....A Fanzine Commentary 159

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW.....A Department 161

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A DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

LET'S talk about institutions this time. Not, of course, those used to confine the delinquent or the mentally ill—or even that which, in the appalling jabberwocky so dear to our legal lights, signifies the appointment of an heir. Let's discuss those vast and intricate frameworks of custom, habit and tutelary acceptance in which we all must live. Certainly, if Man is ever to move beyond the boundaries of Earth, such inquiry into his custom-built psychology is relevant.

There is today a definite trend of thought in influential circles which seeks to debit much of the breakdown of our so-called civilization to collapse of the institutional formulae that regulated the lives of our fathers and grandfathers. Its supporters are convinced that only by returning to lip service of the beliefs and customs of past generations can the world itself survive.

With this we emphatically disagree—thus putting ourselves openly on the side of the angels, or at any rate upon that of Dr. Korzybski and A. E. van Vogt.

A Destructive Element

Even the most cursory glance at our history reveals that there is nothing more fatally destructive to human progress than the development and maintenance of institutions psychology. The classic example, of course, is that of the aged Galileo, forced to deny the mobility of Earth by a group of prelates far more concerned with the preservation of a rigid theology than with truth.

Similar idiocies, more often than not instigated by men unfailingly kind to their dogs, wives and children, spatter past and present like bubbles in a Finlay illustration. Their chief idiosyncrasy lies in their futility—for no institutionalized credo can, in the final analysis, alter fact. It can only cause untold human misery through its efforts at self-preservation. Thus is failure

implicit in the most complete institutionalized civil formula on record—Communism.

Unfortunately institutions are rooted in all-too-human soil. It is natural for men to seek security for their children. And with such security attained it is equally natural for their children to seek to strengthen it not only for themselves and their offspring but against similar security structures reared by men of other families, tribes or nations.

Thus the process begins—and with each generation the edifice grows more rigid and more complex until the day comes when those who benefit from it are outnumbered by those who do not. Then, as the boys in Union Square are wont to say—"comes the revolution."

After which the whole grisly business begins all over again.

It Doesn't Make Sense

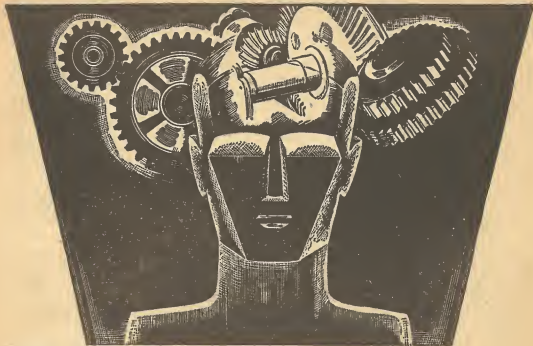
To us it fails utterly to make sense, however human its basis. But what to do about it is something else. If we knew the answer we would, by this time, be either dead or jailed or running the United Nations instead of penning a peristyle such as this:

The fault of most institutions lies in the fact that they are both right and needful for the immature—and that truly mature men and women are as rare as the proverbial hen's teeth in the haystack. Many of us are hopelessly infantile, not only intellectually but, more dangerously, in our emotional reactions. And infants crave security for growth—which is all very well as long as they grow.

Alas, most of us do not. And in a world whose snowballing science demands increasing maturity of vision, thought and action, we seek sanctuary from the imagined horrors of reality beneath the coverlet of custom. Hence we have a world whose unprecedented population leaves

(Continued on page 144)

The Mechanism of Mind



WHY YOU ARE AS YOU ARE—

and *What You Can Do About It!*

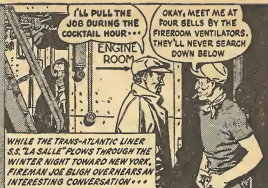
DID you ever stop to think *why* you do the things you do? Have you often—when alone—censored yourself for impulsive urges, for things said or done that did not truly represent *your real thoughts*, and which placed you at a disadvantage? Most persons are *creatures of sensation*—they react to instinctive, impelling influences which surge up within them and which they do not understand—or *know how to control*. Just as simple living things involuntarily withdraw from irritations, so likewise thousands of men and women are content to be motivated by their undirected thoughts which haphazardly rise up in their consciousness. *Today you must sell yourself* to others—bring forth your best abilities, manifest your personality, if you wish to hold a position,

make friends, or impress others with your capabilities. You must learn how to draw upon your latent talents and powers, not be bent like a reed in the wind. There are simple, natural laws and principles which—if you understand them—make all this possible.

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JOE NABBED THE CROOKS AND THEN...



The CONTINENT MAKERS

*Sobersided scientist Gordon Graham
finds himself sadly at sea when his interplanetary
romance is swamped by a tidal wave!*



A Novel
by
L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

CHAPTER I

Bhetiru

GORDON Graham looked up from his calculations as the telephone on his wrist tinkled. When he activated the receiver the voice of his brother Ivor spoke from the little instrument.

"Gordon?"

"Yeah, what is it?" drawled Gordon Graham.

"Busy tonight?"

"We-ell, I'm doing some figuring on the Project..."

"Will you come down out of your scientific cloud long enough to take over one of my tourists this evening?"

"Huh? What sort of tourist?" said Gordon Graham in tones of alarm. He had been through this before.

There was the time he had promised to show New York night-life to a member of Ivor's guided tour when Ivor was otherwise occupied. The tourist had turned out to be an ostrich-man from Thor with a voice like a foghorn in disrepair. All evening, far from enjoying the sight of the noted strippeuse, Alyesha van Leer, doing her famous fig-leaf song, the Thorian had honked into Gordon's ear his bitter complaints about the "partition" of his planet.

It seemed that nearly a hundred years previously, in the early days of interstellar exploration, a party of Earthmen had bought a thinly-inhabited Thorian continent from the chiefs of its primitive natives for some ridiculous price—a record-player with a stack of symphonic records and a case of Irish whiskey or something like that.

When the Irish was gone and the player broken the Thorians had demanded their continent back. Wherefore there had been a little war in which the Thorians, with their spears and boomerangs, had come off second best.

By the time the civilized Thorians of the other continents had roused themselves to take a serious view of the matter a Terrestrial colony was flourishing and a whole new Earthly generation had grown up on the disputed continent.

These circumstances led the Interplanetary Supreme Court to decide that the Thorians might not expel the Earthmen, who had come legally and had been allowed to live there undisturbed for many decades. On the other hand the Interplanetary Council had adopted rules to prevent advanced peoples from exploiting backward ones again.

All of which Gordon's Thorian had recounted in molecular detail in his honking accent until Gordon had nearly gone mad from boredom.

AND then there had been the time he let Ivor talk him into taking one of the latter's tourists to the zoo. The tourist had proved to be an Osirian, a scaly creature like a small bipedal dinosaur, a head taller than a man, with a complicated design painted on its bare hide. The animals had thrown such fits that the keepers ordered Gordon and his companion out, much to Gordon's embarrassment.

"It's a Krishnan this time," said Ivor. "A girl. Practically human too. You'll like her."

"Yeah?" said Gordon Graham. "You said I'd like that ostrich-man from Thor."

"No, no—this isn't like that at all. She's a member of the tour from the republic of Kātai-Jhogorai, which is the most cultured state on the planet. All carefully selected people too. This being Sunday, the other gawkers are resting at the Cosmo but I promised to take Jeru-Bhetiru—that's her name—out to Boonton to visit relatives in the extra-terrestrial colony.

"That was okay but she met an Osirian out there who told her about some society that meets in the Bronx tonight and sold her the idea of going. Since her own boy-friend, who's studying Earthly law at N. Y. U.—since he was busy I said I'd take her, forgetting I already had a date of my own. So—uh—I thought—especially since she's a beauty and an interesting personality—"

"Okay, I'll t-take her," said Gordon Graham. "Where do I meet you?"

"Just a minute while I look at the timetable. We'll be on the Boonton Branch train, Lackawanna Division, that gets into the K. S. T. at seventeen fifty-two."

"All right. See you."

Gordon Graham broke the connection, got up and looked around vaguely for

some clean clothes. Such was the warmth of the late June air that he wouldn't bother with a blouse. He cared nothing for other people's ideas of formality.

He looked at his long-nosed face in the mirror to see if he needed a second shave, decided against it. Then his mind wandered off among the differential equations describing magmatic vortices, on which he had been working, and he

where he and Ivor shared one of the apartments, to walk to the tube station. On the way to the station he passed the helicab lot and toyed for a moment with the idea of taking one of the cabs. It would set him down on the roof of the Columbus Circle Terminal (initial K. S. T. in the new spelling) in ten minutes. On the other hand the time he'd save would not be worth the extra cost.

A Spot of Dementia Hocus



IT HAS long been recognized among those of our planet that take interest in such curiosa that madness at times is a wonderful thing. In making such comment we are not implying, of course, that L. Sprague de Camp, the politalented squire of Lansdowne, Pa., should be incarcerated within quilted walls.

However, in his fiction, a species of utter dementia hocus has for more than a dozen years brought delight to readers of upper-bracket science fiction. In such novels as *Lest Darkness Fall*, *Divide and Rule* and *The Stolen Dormouse*, to say nothing of his hilarious Harold Shea collaborations with Fletcher Pratt and *Genus Homo* with P. Schuyler Miller, his characters, human, animal, mythical and extra-terrestrial follow a logic that is definitely not of this

Earth as we know it.

It is logic, yes, and the characters in question are utterly serious in their pursuit of its logical conclusions. Therein, we believe, lies the magic that makes them unique. Beyond such hard-scrabble bare-surface judgment they defy analysis. And they are uproariously funny in a grave and zany fashion that has made both Krishna, Mr. de Camp's pet planet, and the author famous.

For once, in a short novel length, Mr. de Camp has reversed himself. He is not concerned with the impact of terrestrials upon alien Krishna—rather he has given us a faithful account of the impact of a few Krishnans and other aliens upon Earth. As you are about to discover it is considerable!

—THE EDITOR.

stood lost in thought for ten minutes without moving a muscle.

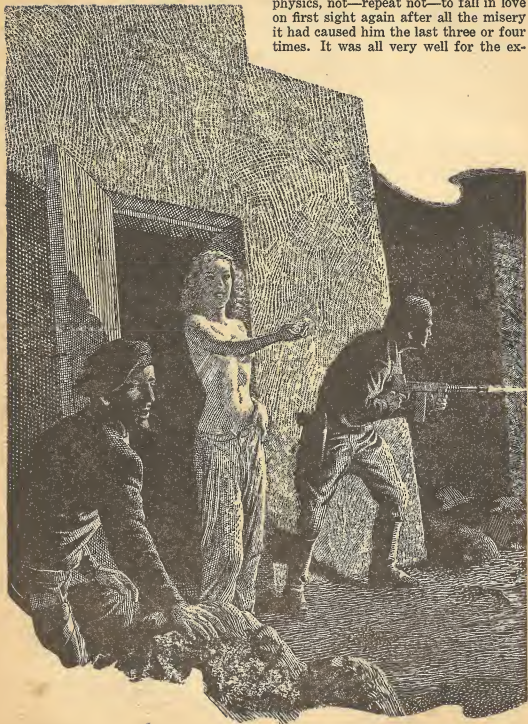
Finally he pulled himself out of his trance, sat down and wrote down a few equations lest he forget them. Then he resumed his preparations. It was later than he thought, so he hurried a bit, as much as he ever hurried. Not that it would do Ivor and his extra-terrestrial girl-friend any great harm to wait a few minutes for him . . .

At last he left the small four-apartment house in Englewood, New Jersey,

On the tube train his mind wandered hazily between his beloved equations and the blind date he had committed himself to. A Krishnan girl *might* be beautiful even by Earthly standards, despite blue-green hair, pointed ears and feathery antennae sprouting from between her eyebrows. And she could presumably talk instead of having to communicate by sign-language with writhing tentacles like an Ishtarian. Still she would not be a human being. Her internal organs . . .

Well, maybe that was just as well. For

Gordon Graham had sworn a great oath, by the founders of the science of geophysics, not—repeat not—to fall in love on first sight again after all the misery it had caused him the last three or four times. It was all very well for the ex-



traverted Ivor to tell him that what he needed was to get married. How could you when all the squids you asked laughed at you?

He got off the train at the K. S. T. While walking through the maze of passages in the terminal he let his mind wander off into some of the more abstruse problems of geophysics. By the time he came to he was on the escalator going down to the High Speed Line

platforms at the lowest level of the station.

AS THE escalator was slowly crawling down two deep decks Graham saved time by reaching up, seizing a cross-bar with a directional sign on it and swinging his long legs easily from the down escalator to the up one next to it. The feat brought startled stares from the other escalator passengers, especially as the



As Jeru-Bhotiru stepped out of the building, Sklar fired his machine-gun

sober-looking Graham did not seem like a young man to put on an impromptu public trapeze-act.

He finally found the gate through which passengers issued from trains of the Lackawanna Division of the North American Railroads. His watch showed

him that he was just in time to meet the 1752 train of the Boonton division—or *Buunten* as the announcement-board had it in reformed spelling. (Graham was always forgetting to sign his checks *Goorden Greiem* and getting in trouble with his bank in consequence.)

The passengers presently streamed out, Ivor among them, almost as tall as Gordon but looking shorter because he was broader. Ivor Graham, ex-football-hero and now local New York guide for the Tilghman Travel Agency, GUIDED TOURS TO ALL PLANETS, introduced his brother to the tall Krishnan girl with the blue hair and the frontless Minoan-style dress of her native planet. The outfit was one to arouse attention even in that sophisticated city and age.

"G-glad to know you, Miss Bhetiru," said Gordon Graham.

Ivor corrected him. "If you must say 'Miss', say 'Miss Jeru.' They put surnames first like the Chinese. I call her 'Betty.'"

"Glad to know you—uh—Betty," said Gordon solemnly.

She smiled warmly. "I am glad to know you too. Of course in my language, if you wanted to use the familiar form, you would call me Jerä-Bhetirä, but I shall be happy with 'Betty.'"

Ivor explained. "Her old man is Jere-Lägle. You know, the Earthly representative of Kätai-Jhogorai for all those years. After her tour finishes its New York stay she's going to leave it and stay on for a few months to study our Earthly child psychology. Doesn't look like a snakepitter, does she?"

Gordon had to admit she didn't. Despite the Oriental cast her flattish Krishnan features gave her she was all Ivor had promised and then some.

Ivor continued. "Gordon's a big-shot scientist on the Gamanovia Project, Betty, as well as an instructor of geophysics at Columbia. He's really a brilliant guy in spite of that sappy look."

"What is the Gamanovia Project?" asked Jeru-Bhetiru.

"Oh, don't you know? It's that scheme

for increasing the land-area of the Earth by making some new continents."

"My ancestors! How do they do that?"

"You tell her, Gordon," said Ivor.

Gordon Graham cleared his throat. "The fact is, Miss—uh—Betty, that we've found how to control currents in the amorphous magnetic substratum."

"Please!" she said, "I do not know all those big words! Can you not make it more simple?"

Gordon collected himself. "Well, you know that if you go down below the surface on a planet like this fifty or sixty miles you'll find yourself in a mass of white-hot lava, which, however, can't flow freely like a true liquid because it's under such terrific pressure.

"But it will flow slowly under long-continued stresses, like cold pitch, and these currents cause movements in the crystalline crust that lies on top of this substratum. That's how we get mountain ranges and oceanic deeps and things.

"Now we find that, by setting off atomic charges in the substratum at a controlled rate of disintegration, we can control these magmatic currents, as they're called, so as to cause parts of the ocean bed to rise to the surface and other parts to sink deeper so as not to flood the existing land-surfaces."

"How do you get the charges down there?"

"By a 'maggot'—a kind of mechanical mole, remote-controlled from the surface. Say, what's next on the program, Ivor? Have you folks eaten yet?"

Ivor Graham directed them to the K. S. T. restaurant while Gordon, now warmed up to fine professorial fettle, went on with his explanation.

Jeru-Bhetiru asked, "Why do they call it 'Gamanovia'?"

"Because that will be the name of the first new experimental continent. It's to be raised in the South Atlantic around Ascension Island and every nation in the World Federation had its own idea of what it should be named. Most of 'em had their pet national heroes

in mind—the Indians wanted 'Nehruvia,' for instance.

"Somebody suggested 'Atlantis' but it was objected that in the first place Plato's imaginary Atlantis was in the North Atlantic and in the second, if this experiment worked, we'd probably want to raise another continent in the North Atlantic and we'd better save that name for it.

"Brazil wanted to name the new continent either after Vasco da Gama, the first European to navigate those waters, or João da Nova, who discovered Ascension Island a few years later. When the others said 'Gamia' and 'Novia' would be lousy names for continents the Brazilians just grinned and said, 'All right, senhores, we'll run them both together and call it "Gamanovia." And being the world's leading power . . ."

"Here we are," said Ivor. "Hey, Gordon, don't you want to wash your hands?"

Gordon Graham looked to discover that he did indeed want to wash his hands—and literally, not as a euphemism. For the steel bar by which he had swung from one escalator to the other had borne a thick coating of dust on its upper surface. He got lost a couple of times before he found a men's washroom on the next lower storey.

AS THIS was Sunday the room happened to be entirely empty at the moment. As Graham was soaping his hands a smallish dark man came in nervously puffing a cigarette, apparently on a similar errand. But then the man suddenly spoke.

"Ain't you Dr. Gordon Graham?"

"Huh?" said Graham vaguely, startled out of his daydream of the beautiful Bhetiru. "Y-yes—that is, I haven't got my Ph.D. yet—but I am Gordon Graham."

"Good. I must spick to you soon. Are you goink places toingt?" The man seemed to have a slight Slavic accent.

"Yes, b-but who are you?"

"My name is Sklar. I will tell you more

about myself later."

"And—uh—what do you want to see me about?"

"About your Gamanovia Project. You'll have to teck my word that it is important. I can't go into details now. What time do you get home from work tomorrow?"

"Let's see, that's Monday—oh, about fifteen hundred."

"Good, I will see you there—"

The man broke off and whirled as two other men, much larger than he, came in through the door and stalked swiftly towards the two who already occupied the washroom. One of them had his right hand in his blouse pocket, which bulged as if its wearer were pointing a gun, inside the pocket, towards the self-styled Sklar. The other faced Graham, placed a large hand on his chest and gave a sharp push.

Graham sighed. It was always that way. People looking for trouble, deceived by his long soupy look and unaware that boxing had been his undergraduate sport in college, insisted on picking on him. And then he just had to take measures. He took them now; he put away his glasses and followed this act with a lead with his left to the ribs and a long straight right to the man's right eye.

The man tottered and fell backwards, supine, his head hitting the tiles with a distinct thud. The other man turned at the sound and Graham wondered in a flash if he had been so stupid as to provoke the man to shooting him. It really wasn't worth—

However, Sklar instantly did something that sent a stream of vapor from the ring he wore into the second man's face, so that the victim began at once to blink, sneeze, cough and sputter. Then Sklar stepped close to the man. His hand came out of a pocket with a black-jack, laid the sap hard against the man's skull. This man too swayed and collapsed like a felled Douglas fir.

But now the man Graham had hit was getting up, his still-open left eye glaring

furiously. Sklar took a whack at him too but the man saw him coming and knocked him aside with the sweep of an arm like the loom of a gallery-oar. For a few seconds they mixed it.

Graham, taking advantage of his orangutanian reach, landed a couple more good ones to the face. Then a repeated thud told Graham that Sklar was working on the man's cranium with his black-jack from behind. And although his skull seemed to be one of more than ordinary thickness this man at last folded up on the tiles also.

"Now, ain't this somethink?" said Sklar, staring at the bodies. He quickly bent and searched the men, taking a pistol out of the pocket of one and stowing it in his own. "Help me get them out of here quick," he said.

"Huh? What d'you mean?" said Graham. "Why don't you call a cop?"

"I *am* a cop!" said the small man impatiently, whipping out a wallet and flapping it in Graham's face. Graham got a glimpse of the identification card of *Reinhold Sklar, World Federation Constable, Second Grade*. Some sort of Central European, Graham surmised. Sklar continued, "So I don't want no city poliss buttink into my case."

Sklar looked swiftly around, still puffing on the same cigarette he had been smoking when the fight started. In the far corner of the washroom was a small green door bearing the words KIIP AUT—the kind of door found all over large modern buildings. Everybody walks by them without even wondering whether they conceal broom-closets, back-stairs or what. Sklar pushed it and it opened.

"Lucky for us some pipple is laxative about locking doors," he said. "Take that one's shoulders now—they are too big for me to move all by myself. Quick, before somebody comes in."

GRAHAM, a bit bewildered by all this, did as he was told. Between them they lugged both unconscious forms through the small door and out onto an

iron platform a little more than a meter square.

This platform in turn gave access to a circular iron staircase that extended up and down from it. Upward it disappeared into a tangle of dimly-lit girders—downward it ended on the extreme end of one of the loading-platforms of the High Speed Line, on the lowest level of the K. S. T. They were definitely backstage, now.

"Down," said Sklar softly and they began hauling one of the bodies down the helical stair. When they had dropped the first on the concrete they went back for the second. The platform tapered at the end like the bow of a ship and a couple of meters back of the stair was a huge square concrete pillar that cut off the view of the rest of the platform. They stood in shadow and in near-silence, except for the occasional distant rumble of a train on one of the higher levels.

Graham whispered, "What's all this about? Who are these gloops? And what's it got to do with me?"

"Tell you tomorrow," snapped Sklar, peering around the right side of the pillar. Below them gleamed the single ground-rail of the High Speed Line, twice the size of a normal railroad rail, while the overhead rail, which kept the cars upright, glimmered above.

A few meters from where they stood, on the other side of the pillar, the smooth nose of a High Speed articulated car, tapering to a rounded point like that of an artillery-sheel, reflected the lights of the station. Somewhere under the rounded body the air-compressor chugged faintly.

"That one only goes to Washington, and won't live for half an hour," said Sklar. "Should be one comink in on the other track soon."

As he spoke there came a click of relays from the other side of the platform and a purr of motors. Another car crawling into view on the empty track. The nose came closer and closer and did not stop until it was even with the sur-



"Oho," said Sklar, "here comes that wave!"

face of the pillar behind which Sklar and Graham stood.

Sklar made a warning motion. "Wait till the yard motorman lives his cab," he said. "Then we put these characters in the mail-compartment."

After a few seconds' wait Graham heard a door-latch click and the sound of retreating footsteps. Sklar murmured. "All right, now we got two minutes. Help me!"

When they dragged the first body around the corner of the pillar, Graham fully expected to run into a flock of people—railroad employees and passengers. But the platform was empty. Sklar opened the door in the side of the car and they lugged the man in. Then they repeated the operation with the other. As this one was showing signs of coming to he had to be quieted by another tap of the blackjack.

"Graham," said Sklar, "stand by the door. If you see anybody comink alunk the platform tell me.

And he fell to work with the expertness of long practise, binding and gagging the men with handkerchiefs, shoelaces and other items of clothing.

"Nobody there?" he whispered. "Good. Hold this guy up so as I can get this mail-bag over his head."

When both men had been stowed in mail-bags and shoved into a corner Sklar dusted his hands and said, "All right, now we go. Your brother will be missink you. Not a word about this, you understand. Will you be alone in your apartment tomorrow afternoon?"

"I—uh—guess so," said Graham. "Ivor never gets in before eighteen hundred and usually not till late in the evening."

"Good." Sklar took a last look at the car in which they had hidden their attackers. An electric truck piled with mail-bags was rumbling towards them down the platform, and beyond it Graham could see a few early passengers coming down the escalator to board the car.

Sklar said, "We just made it. I wrote

Kansas City on their tags, so unless some blip gets curious as to what's in them, they will be in Kansas City in another fourtin hours. I only wish the Line ran on to Los Angeles."

He led the way back up the circular staircase and into the washroom, where he coolly removed traces of the recent fracas. Graham, watching him with some slight awe, did likewise.

"Hurry, Graham," said Sklar. "I don't want your friends askink what you have been up to. Tomorrow at fiftin hundred, yes? Okus-dokus. So lunk. See you." And he was gone.

CHAPTER II

The Churchillians

AND—er—what d' you think of Earth, Betty?" said Gordon Graham.

"Hey," said Ivor Graham. "How'd you get your knuckles skinned? Been in a scrap?"

Gordon shook his head and kept looking at Jeru-Bhetiru, who answered, "Fascinating—but so *much* water! It would give me a complex to know the land is nothing but an island surrounded by water."

"My Osirian tourists feel the same," said Ivor. "Not having any oceans none of 'em knows how to swim. In fact the mere suggestion makes 'em shudder. On the other hand the monkey-rats of Thoth, having nothing but one big ocean with a lot of islands—"

"Can swim," Gordon broke in. "Go on, Betty."

"And there are so few young ones!"

"With the lengthening of human life the old ones have become relatively more numerous and we have to control our increase or there'd soon be standing room only. How about our human culture?"

"I was trying to say—" said Ivor.

Jeru-Bhetiru paid him no more attention than did his brother. She said, "It fascinates me too. To us poor backward Krishnans the Earth is a kind of glamorous fairyland. But most of all I am interested in human psychology. That is of course my—line, I think you call it? It is much like yours but different in some ways. I should like to analyze you, for example."

"Wh-what?" said Gordon, pinkening. "You mean you'd want me to lie down on a couch and Tell All?"

"Don't waste your time on him," said Ivor. "You wouldn't get anything interesting. Gordon's heart is pure even if his strength isn't as the strength of ten but only two point seven. Now me—"

Gordon said: "Uh—don't let him fool you, Betty. Ivor wouldn't appreciate the purity of your motives. Couches make him think of things other than scientific research."

"Depends on what you call research," said Ivor. "If you two will stop gazing into each other's eyes, I've been trying to say it's time to go to your meeting. I'm going anyway. Here's my half of the check."

Gordon Graham and Jeru-Bhetiru looked up in some confusion but pulled themselves together to say good-bye to Ivor. After some further discussion of psychology Gordon Graham said, "Guess he's right. We'd best be going."

She took his arm as they walked slowly out, almost wandering through the door before a whistle from the cashier reminded Graham that he had not paid for his dinner. He laughed a silly laugh, let the cashier short-change him without noticing and went on out.

So busy were he and the Krishnan girl with each other that they bumped into two pillars and five pedestrians and got lost three time before they found the exit to the subway.

For Gordon Graham the world was beginning to take on that rosy glow it invariably assumed when he had just met the latest girl of his dreams. His previous resolutions? Foey. What if his

friends should look askance on the idea of his marrying a being of another species? He cared nothing about that—let the morrow take care of itself. He had found an ornamental companion, a soul-mate, a listener. What else mattered?

They took a Concourse Express to Bedford Park Boulevard and walked east, toward where Mosholu Parkway emerges from Bronx Park, with the late June sunset at their backs. Among the apartment buildings stood a sprinkling of old one-family houses, some going back centuries.

"Should be somewhere along here," drawled Graham. "Sa-ay, Betty, what is this Churchillian Society?"

She replied, "The'erhiya told me it tries to prove that a twentieth-century playwright named George Bernard Shaw could not have composed the plays he is supposed to have written but that, instead, they must have been conceived by a statesman of the time named Winston Churchill."

"Churchill? Wasn't he an early British labor-leader who wrote socially-conscious novels around 1900?"

"I should not know, Gorodon." She always made three syllables of his name, a fault of enunciation he found wholly charming.

"We can look it up later, but isn't it funny for an Osirian to be interested in such things? Who's The'erhiya?"

"My friends in Boonton told me he is a famous speculator. I met him at this party, with his partner, the Thorian Adzik. He carried Adzik around in the crook of his arm."

"Hey! Are you sure you don't mean Adzik the Thothian?"

"Why?"

"Thorians are too big to be carried on anybody's arm. Ostrich-men, we call 'em."

"You must be right. Thorian, Thothian. I confuse your Earthly names for other planets. Why did they choose two so much alike?"

"Just happened. You see we called the

planets of our own system after Roman gods back before space-travel and when we found other planets we named 'em after other mythologies. Your star got Indian gods—Epsilon Eridani got Norse gods—and Procyon got Egyptian gods.”

“Why must you give your own names to other stars and planets? It seems a little arrogant.”

“Because when we ask the natives of a strange planet what they call it, they give us answers in a hundred different languages, half of which we can't pronounce and all meaning something like *home* or *ground*. Some don't even speak but talk by waving their tentacles. But go on about The'erhiya.”

“Well, he carried the Thothian—is that right?—in the crook of his arm like—like—”

“Like a teddy-bear, I guess you'd say.”

“Teddy-bear? Anyway, I do not much like Osirians, even this The'erhiya, who was polite enough. They frighten me with their big sharp teeth and that pseudohypnotic power they are said to have.”

“Oh, I dunno,” said Graham generously. “I've met some that weren't bad sorts, in spite of their scales and that weird hissing accent. They're kind of impulsive and sentimental but otherwise not so different from Earthmen and Krishnans mentally. What more did The'erhiya tell you?”

“Not much, because he—how do you say it—passed out.”

“Really?”

“Yes. You know they cannot drink out of our kind of cups and glasses but use a thing like an oil-can. And the first thing we knew, there was The'erhiya, the famous speculator, sprawled in a corner, with these empty vessels with the long spouts all around him—and the little Thothian making clucking noises to show how unhappy he was about it all.”

Graham tore his attention away from Jeru-Bhetiru long enough to look at a house-number. He exclaimed, “Shucks, we walked past our number!”

WHEN they finally turned in at the right address, which proved to be one of the old private houses, a man standing in the shadow inside the doorway said, “Good evening.”

Graham said, “Good evening. Is this where the Churchillian Society meets?”

“Yes indeed. Wait a minute—aren't you Gordon Graham, the geophysicist?”

“Yeah, that's me. How did you know?”

“Oh, you're a better-known man than you think, Mr. Graham. And we're *very* glad to see you. Won't you step in?”

Light chairs were arranged in rows in what had evidently once been a living-room. Some people occupied some of these chairs while others stood around talking. The room's main decoration comprised a large portrait photograph of Winston Churchill, wearing the flowing necktie and stiff collar of his period.

As Graham led Jeru-Bhetiru to a pair of vacant seats another man—a stout bald fellow—said, “Good evening, Mr. Graham.”

Graham was sure he had never seen either this man or the one at the door before. Something was going on that he didn't understand. First the strange encounter with Sklar and the two men who had attacked them—now this. He was sure he had never been here before either. He didn't even have that feeling of pseudo-memory the psychologists called *déjà vu*.

The stout bald man, whom somebody referred to as Mr. Warschauer, called the meeting to order. There ensued the usual tedious round of discussion of membership, dues and other topics of no interest to outsiders. Graham kept whispering to Jeru-Bhetiru, earning disapproving frowns from his neighbors.

Then Mr. Warschauer introduced a Mr. Donaghy, a small white-haired man, as the speaker of the evening. Mr. Donaghy got up in front and launched into an impassioned oration on his favorite subject.

“... and what do we know of this George Bernard Shaw, as he called himself? All we have to go on is a few bi-

ographies, mostly biased—questionable memoirs which fail to agree in many vital respects—and microfilm records of the notoriously corrupt and unreliable press of the twentieth century.

"Well, who was this so-called Shaw, anyway? From what little trustworthy evidence there is available he would not seem to have been a man of distinguished antecedents, which in those days of class distinction were necessary before a man could rise to intellectual eminence.

"So far from being a man of noble lineage or a descendant of distinguished litterateurs, he was the son of a corn-merchant! It is known that Shaw, as he is called, never attended school after the age of 14. Furthermore, to judge from the eccentric spellings by which he anticipated the modern curse of the so-called reformed orthography, he never paid much attention to learning even when it was offered to him . . ."

GRAHAM, having almost immediately caught the general drift of Donaghy's argument, paid it no more attention, devoting himself to gazing at Jeru-Bhetiru's profile.

" . . . five years working in a real-estate office, of all places! How could the author of *Pygmalion* and *Candida* have endured such a stultifying atmosphere? A man of such sensitivity of soul would have gone mad in a week!

"And when he did at last abandon the sordid career of rent-collector to try to earn a literary livelihood he soon showed

himself utterly incapable of doing so. In the first nine years of his new career he earned by his pen just six pounds, or about twenty-eight modern World Federation dollars. The publishers rejected four novels, as they were called, one after the other.

"In one of these he showed his depraved tastes by setting his scene in the prize-fighting business. Try to imagine, if you can, the author of *Saint Joan* writing about brutal and vulgar pugilists! And associating with them to pick up the necessary background and color . . ."

Graham shook his head vigorously to keep from falling asleep.

Donaghy, seeing the motion, said sharply, "Do you have a question, young man?"

"N-no," said Graham, reddening. "I—ah—I went swimming and got water in my ear."

"Ahem. To resume—finally obtaining a toehold on the fringe of the profession of letters, the *soi-disant* Shaw engaged in the lowest form of the craft—literary criticism. Even so, he showed not enough stability of character to hold any one job for long, but instead drifted from one publication to another . . ."

HE LET his hand steal out on a foraging-mission of its own until it found one of Jeru-Bhetiru's and clasped it. She not only did not try to draw away but even returned his squeeze. The thumping of his heart all but drowned out

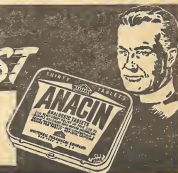
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what Mr. Donaghy was saying—not that Graham cared a damn what Donaghy said.

"Then who *did* write these plays, if not the so-called Shaw? Ah, who indeed?"

"There was at that time one young man in Britain whose mind was in truth afire with the creative urge but who could not have openly avowed his ambition in this direction because of the social and political tabus of the period. For such an aristocrat, son of a lord and grandson of a duke, playwriting was not an acceptable occupation in those distant days.

"Nor were theatrical people welcomed into exclusive circles like his. Moreover the plays he had stirring in his unconscious would gravely have compromised the political career for which he was destined both by his own transcendent ability and by the tradition of his family.

"Therefore, we are persuaded—nay, forced—to believe that this great man must have made a deal with the alleged Shaw, to let the plays he wrote but could not be signed be published under the name of this seedy hanger-on. Shaw, for his part, was willing enough to have his name used in this fashion though he himself lacked the talent . . ."

For final proof of his thesis, Mr. Donaghy drew on the blackboard an anagram consisting of the names of 23 of the plays of the "so-called" Shaw, so arranged that one vertical row of letters read WINSTON SPENCER CHURCHILL.

Everybody clapped loudly. Everybody, that is, except Graham and Jeru-Bhetiru, who could not do so without letting go each other's hands and who were not enough impressed by Mr. Donaghy to do that.

It all seemed pretty thin to Graham, though he hardly knew enough about the literary history of the Century of Catastrophe to argue the matter. One thing he was sure of—he had evidently confused Winston Churchill with a

couple of other fellows. He'd have to look him up in the *Encyclopedia*.

Moreover he was surprised to see, on looking at his watch, that two hours had passed since they had sat down. People were rising to leave. Some had gathered round Donaghy to argue or to praise him.

Graham was leading out Jeru-Bhetiru when the fat Warschauer materialized in front of them, saying, "I'm so glad you've come at last, Mr. Graham. We've been looking forward to meeting you."

"Really?" said Graham. How the devil could they have been looking forward to meeting him when he had never heard of them before this afternoon, was not at all interested in their screwball literary theories and had nothing in common with them?

"Yes, really," said Warschauer. "Will you step back into our board room? The other officers of our little society are most eager to meet you too."

"We really must be getting along," said Graham.

"No, really, my dear young people, you simply *must* step in for a minute. Only for a minute. We have a proposal I think you'll find interesting and if you don't like it you can run right along."

"Let us see what this nice man wants, Gorodon," said Jeru-Bhetiru. "I am in no hurry."

Against his better judgment Graham gave in and preceded Warschauer to the rear of the house. Here he found himself in an ex-dining room, facing a couple of other men.

Warschauer said, "This is Mr. Lundquist"—indicating a jowly, red-faced, gray-haired man—"and Mr. Edwards"—the small wiry red-haired man who had met Graham at the front door. "Go ahead, Chris."

"So glad to know you," said Lundquist. "How you doing?"

"All right," said Graham. "What's this proposition Mr. Warschauer was hinting about?"

Lundquist said, "This business conference will bore the young lady. Jim, why

don't you take care of her in the next room?" When Edwards had taken Jeru-Bhetiru out he continued. "You admit, Dr. Graham, that scientists ain't paid enough, don't you?"

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose you might argue that way. Why?"

"But you'd like to make more now, wouldn't you?"

"Who wouldn't? But what's all this got to do with Shaw and Churchill?" Graham admitted to himself that these did not seem much like desperate characters. But then, never having known any desperate characters, how could he judge?

Lundquist smiled. "Nothing at all, my friend. We're thinking of a deal more in line with your scientific work. You know, on that Ganna—Gamanovia Project."

"Huh? How come?"

"We can't go into details because the chief is away tonight. All I can say is it has to do with geophysics, and it could be very profitable to you. What I want now is for you to tell us you'll come back here tomorrow at this time and talk it over with the boss."

"Who's the boss? I thought *you* were."

Lundquist smiled. "Not quite."

STILL things did not seem quite right. Graham said, "How did you know about me? I haven't published anything on Gamanovia and I've only been working on it part-time, as a consultant."

"Oh, we've had our eye on you for some time. By the way—" Lundquist turned to Warschauer—"what's happened to Smith and Magazzo? They called from the K.S.T. around eighteen, saying they had their eyes on our friend here, but they ain't come in and ain't reported since. They don't just disappear into thin air now."

Graham's mind, although fuzzy at times, reacted instantly to this statement. Lundquist must have had him tailed by the pair he and Sklar had tangled with earlier. If Sklar were kosher

the group operating behind the front of the Churchillian Society wasn't. He rose.

"Sorry," he said, "b-but Miss Jeru and I have to run along. Right n-now. If you have a proposal to make you can write me care of Columbia University. Oh, *Betty!*"

"Yes, Gordon?" She opened the door from the next room. Behind her Graham could see a table with a chessboard set up on it, pieces in play and two chairs, one occupied by Edwards. The latter also got up and moved towards this door. Graham deliberately took off his glasses, put them in their case, put the case in his pocket.

"C-c-come on, Betty," said Gordon Graham. He started for the door.

But the stout Warschauer barred his way, saying, "Now, now just a min, Dr. Graham. Let's not be hasty. Nothing will be asked of you that's against your principles."

That was as far as he got because Graham's bony fist caught him in the nose, slamming his head back against the door with a resounding boom. Warschauer's legs went out from under him as he slid into a Billiken-like sitting posture, legs extended and back still against the door.

Graham, however, now found that he could not open the door so long as Warschauer sprawled against it. If he could have lugged the body to one side quickly enough, he might still have been able to get them both out before the others grabbed them. But even as he heaved at the body, hands caught him from behind and dragged him back. Turning he found himself grappling with Edwards, who, it transpired, was a strong little man.

Graham nevertheless got a couple of good short ones into Edward's ribs, at the same time calling, "*Run, B-Betty! Get the cops! Yell for help!*"

Instead of yelling Jeru-Bhetiru grabbed a light chair by the back, intending to wallop Edwards with it. Before she could do so, however, Lundquist snatched the chair away from

her and threw it across the room. Then he caught her arm with one hand and with the other brought out a thing like a paint-sprayer. Graham recognized it as an Osirian electrostatic gun.

"Better not," said Lundquist, pointing the shock-gun at the Krishnan girl. "You too, Graham. Calm down or I'll burn her."

Graham cautiously disentangled himself from Edwards, who went over to help the fallen Warschauer to his feet. The latter was holding a bloody handkerchief in front of his face, muttering: "He busted by doze! What the hell business has a sciedtist got, pudchig people id the doze?"

"Now, my friends," said Lundquist, "we'll talk business. I'm afraid we'll have to hold Miss What's-her-name here to make sure you coöperate with us. It would have been nicer if you'd done it of your own accord—but if that's the way it is, that's the way it is. During the lecture you acted like you think she's a pretty sweet little squid. Is that right?"

Graham, feeling that he had probably talked too much for his own good already, stared silently. Warschauer kept muttering through his nosebleed, "I got to get to a doctor to fix up by doze!"

"I guess we can take it you wudden want to see her killed, now would you?" Lundquist continued. "So you'll do this, my friend. You'll leave here quietly and go home without saying nothing to nobody about what happened here or about the Churchillian Society or any goddam thing at all, get me?"

"Then you'll come back here tomorrow night like I asked you in the foist place. Miss What's-her-name won't be here but we'll be taking good care of her. And you can be sure if you try anything you won't never see her alive again. Do you understand what I'm saying, bub?"

"You mean you'll m-murder her?" said Graham.

"Not exactly. You can only moider human beans and she's only some kind of animated vegetable from some goddam planet. But you get the idea. Well,

my friend?"

"Okay," said Graham wearily.

He exchanged one last look with Jeru-Bhetiru. In his imagination her appealing expression implied that she expected him to leap upon Lundquist, wrest the weapon from him and massacre the miscreants. Graham, however, knew as well as the next man that as long as Lundquist remained alert he could not possibly leap the gap between them before Lundquist's finger tightened on the trigger.

Then he went out, hearing at the last the plaintive voice of Warschauer behind him. "... by poor doze!"

CHAPTER III

Missing—One Krishnan

GRAHAM'S ride home was the most miserable of his life. Not only did he feel the self-loathing of one who has let a loved one down but he was also assailed by pettler fears.

For instance, what in God's name should he tell Ivor when the latter asked him what had become of his tourist?

If he simply told him what had happened the impulsive Ivor might do something leading to Jeru-Bhetiru's destruction. While he got along well enough with his brother he didn't trust Ivor's judgment for a minute, at least not in enterprises of great pith and moment.

Lundquist had impressed him, not as a preternaturally clever man but one with the simple and direct brutality that in some circumstances makes a man even more formidable. And Graham thought he would do what he threatened to do. The idea of treating murderers as psychiatric cases had given all would-be killers a wonderfully secure feeling that they could get away with anything.

If he had only had the sense to agree with them, until he and Betty were allowed to go free and then . . .

Ivor was not in when Gordon Graham got home and Gordon went to bed forthwith. When Ivor did come in a little later Gordon pretended to be already asleep to forestall questions.

Next morning, as usual, he had to get up at the same time as Ivor. The latter, however, seemed to sense nothing unusual.

He slapped Gordon on the back, saying, "Boy, you sure hit it off with the little squid! Don't go falling for her the way you did with that last dame I introduced you to. She's not really human, you know. So there wouldn't be any—ah—issue to your union, if I may put it delicately. Not that you couldn't have fun trying . . ."

While Ivor rattled on, Gordon Graham smiled a sickly smile and went out to take the tube to work. He found himself counting the hours until Sklar had promised to call on him. If anybody would know what to do Sklar would. But did he dare tell even Sklar?

Wouldn't he consider it his duty to pounce on the gang, undeterred by such considerations as the life of an e. t. tourist? Or—was he even a real World Federation constable? In his present mood Gordon Graham felt suspicious of everybody from his brother down.

As the spring term was over his current work at Columbia consisted of correcting the last batch of papers. He rushed through this chore and took the subway back to Englewood without spending his usual hour in the library.

Back home he tried to bury himself in a recent report by the South African Geological Survey on bathymagnetic fields in the substratum—all the time listening with one ear for the buzzer. At last it sounded.

He quickly admitted his caller, expecting Sklar, to whom he had finally decided to pour out his tale of woe. Instead it turned out to be a young-looking Krishnan in Earthly costume, with antennae and green hair, as tall as Graham and wider in the shoulders. A fine figure of a man, in fact.

"Are you Gordon Graham?" said the visitor, in better English than Sklar used.

"Yes. What—"

"Then what have you done with Jeru-Bhetiru?" The young man pushed into the Graham apartment in a menacing manner.

"Nothing," said Gordon Graham. "Who are you and what are you after anyway?"

The Krishnan put fists on hips. "I am Varnipaz bad-Savarun, chief lawyer—I think you would say Attorney-General—to Prince Ferrian bad-Arjanaq of Sotaspé, an island on the planet Krishna. Jeru-Bhetiru is my—ah—fiancée, I think you say."

"Glunk!" Graham digested this news. This caller must be the boy-friend Ivor had mentioned. If Ivor had come right out and said "fiancé" he might have been better prepared.

VARNIPAZ continued. "She was staying at the Cosmo Hotel in New York with the other*members of the guided tour she is on and last night she went out with you. Now, do not misunderstand me. I do not mind that she goes out with you—it is not as if she and I were in love or anything foolish like that.

"But when I called her hotel this morning she had not come back and your brother, who takes these tourists around the sights of New York, did not know what had become of her. Now will you talk?"

"I'd be glad if I could," said Graham. "But I don't know where she is now either."

"What happened?" said the newcomer, his voice rising to a shout.

"I can't tell you that yet. If—uh—you'll wait a while."

"You mean, wait while you think up some plausible-sounding lie! Mr. Graham, either you tell me all you know right now or—"

"Or what?" said Graham, taking off his glasses.

"You will see. Will you tell?"

"N-no, I w-w—"

Graham ducked as Varnipaz's fist hurtled towards him. Graham got in a stiff left before Varnipaz could avoid it, rocking the extra-terrestrial back. Then Graham prepared to move in with a killing right. If he could just line Varnipaz up . . .

Instead of trying to avoid or block the blow Varnipaz stepped into it before it had got well started and grappled.

They carried away a picture hanging on the wall, and crashed to the floor, trying to use elbows and knees while keeping their grip on each other. Graham got a fist loose long enough to give Varnipaz a couple where his kidneys ought to be—if Krishnans had kidneys and had them in the same place as human beings, which was unlikely.

Varnipaz retaliated by fastening his fingers around Graham's left thumb and twisting until Graham tore it loose. They broke for an instant and scrambled up. Graham knocked Varnipaz backwards with a quick one-two, bringing the floor-lamp down in ruin.

Then he stepped forward for a knock-out punch. As he did so, however, Varnipaz, staggering a little, threw himself into another clinch and skillfully tripped Graham. Down they went again, thrashing and kicking. Over went a chair. They got up, still struggling.

"*Yeow!*" yelled Graham as Varnipaz sank his teeth into his forearm. "I'll smash you!" He snapped a knee towards the Krishnan's crotch. Varnipaz, however, saw it coming and twisted his body so that the knee bounced off his hip. Graham realized that while he might be the better boxer his antagonist had the edge in wrestling. Thinking the smelling antennae might be sensitive he groped towards them.

"Okay, break it up!" said a voice from the doorway.

Both fighters looked around to see Sklar standing there with his hat on the side of his head, a cigarette in the corner of his mouth and one hand making a significant bulge in his pocket.

"We might as well," said Graham. "He's got us covered."

They disengaged themselves, each watching the other carefully against a treacherous blow. Varnipaz had the makings of a fine black eye while Graham had toothmarks on his arm and a cut on one hand from broken glass. He began picking up the debris.

"Looks like a tomato had been through here," said Sklar. "What's this all about?"

Both Graham and Varnipaz launched into an explanation at once. After a few minutes Sklar held up a hand.

"I get the idea so far," he said. "Mr. Graham, maybe you better tell us what *did* happen last night."

"With *him* here?" said Graham. "I think it has to do with—uh—you know—that trouble we had in the station."

"That's all right. I know about Varnipaz and I think we can trust him."

"Perhaps *you* know *me*," said Varnipaz, "but *I* do not know *you*. Will you explain yourself, please?"

Sklar brought out his wallet and showed his credentials to the Krishnan, saying, "Go on pliz, Mr. Graham."

Graham had stepped into the kitchenette for a paper bag and was squatting and picking up pieces of glass. As he worked he told the whole story of the visit to the meeting of the Churchillian Society—omitting only the fact that he had fallen in love with Jeru-Bhetiru and that he suspected her of returning the sentiment.

Despite Varnipaz's curious remark earlier about not being in love with his affianced, Graham thought it a little tactless to mention his own feelings in front of him.

He finished with, "... and now maybe you can tell *me* what's happening. Here I am, the most p-p-peaceable sort of guy you could find, who hasn't been in a brawl since he was a kid. And now I've been in three fights in the last twenty-four hours. I've been involved in kidnapping, assault and goodness knows what else. What goes on?"

SKLAR put another cigarette in his mouth, drew quickly on it and said, "This gank, as you call them, is up to something. Just what, I am supposed to find out.

"It has some connection with the Gamanovia Project, as you know yourself, and there are rumors that it is really run by extra-terrestrial interests. What sort of e. t.'s I don't know either. Can you offer any suggestions, Prince?"

Varnipaz waved a deprecating hand. "I do not use the title here on Earth, where you are nearly all republicans. Besides it makes people confuse me with my cousin Ferrian, the Prince Regent. As for your question, I do not know either.

"Not counting the other Mr. Graham's tourists there are only about twenty Krishnans on Earth and I know most of them personally. You people screen us very carefully to make sure nobody tries to break your technological blockade. But I do not know why any should be especially interested in Gamanovia. We have no oceans to fish continents out of."

Graham said, "Wouldn't the fact that Lundquist used an—uh—Osirian electric gun indicate that there was an Osirian in it?"

"Might," said Sklar. "Earthmen seldom use the shock-gun because it ain't practical in cities. When you shoot it you burn out the electric wiring for mitters around. But that still don't give a risen. Osirians haven't got oceans either, have they?"

"Not as I remember. It's a dry planet."

"Well then, who'd want to interfere with the Gamanovia Project?"

"Could it be somebody thinks this increased land area would increase our military potential so as to violate the arms limitation treaty?"

Sklar shook his head. "Fetched pretty far, if you don't mind me saying so. How about that island where you got all that control equipment, that will be in the middle of the continent? Who owns it?"

"Ascension? A Spaniard named Teó-

flo March, who raises turtles."

"How'd this guy get the island? He must have folding money."

"When the World Federation took over the strategic islands and waterways like Gibraltar and the Panama Canal they got Ascension. Then a few years ago they sold some of these pieces of real estate at auction and Senor March bought this one. Now we've got a contract to buy it back before the continent rises. Since he's doing all right on the deal I don't see why he should object."

"What government has sovereignty of Ascension?"

"None."

"You can't do that! If none of the national governments has it it must come under W. F. jurisdiction."

"No, that's the funny thing. W. F. territory is limited by its constitution to certain kinds of land like the Kalahari Preserve and Antarctica. When the W. F. gave up Ascension it would normally have reverted to Great Britain but the British refused it on grounds that it would cost more to administer this useless pile of volcanic clinkers than it was worth."

"So this March could call himself Emperor of Ascension if he wanted to?"

"I suppose he could. But look here, instead of theorizing, now that you know about the Churchillian Society, why don't you raid the place and run in the lot?"

"First," said Sklar, "because we'd only catch the small fries. They are smart enough not to let their right hands know what their left are doink. Second, because they would probably kill Miss Jeru if they were threatened. You wouldn't like that, would you?"

"No!" exclaimed the two younger men at once.

"So we have to do what we can. You know, Graham, that was not so smart of you to rouse them up by defyink them while they still had you and the young lady in their power. You should have pretended to agree—"

"I know that now," said Graham. "It was the stupidest thing I've done since

I was a frosh. But I'm new at bulldogging."

"I understand. But then they ain't supermen either and they made mistakes too. Most battles is won by the side that mecks the fewest mistakes, you know. That gun, for instance. And tippink you off that two of their men was missink, so you connected them with the fight earlier."

"What about Smith and Magazzo?" asked Graham.

"I hope to have a receptions committee when they arrive in Kansas City," said Sklar. "We should be able to hold them on some charge for a few days at list. If they were arrested here in New York the gank would find out about it."

VARNIPAZ said, "This talk is all very well, but what shall we do? I cannot sit making abstract remarks on crime and punishment while your vile Earthly gang kills my fiancée. At home I would buckle on my best sword, mount my noble *aya* and gallop off to the rescue. But how does one do that on Earth where all is done by pushing electric buttons?"

Sklar thought a minute and said, "Do you two both want to help me?"

"Yes," they replied in chorus.

"Good. I nide your help too and I know enough about you to think I can trust you. I can deputize you both right here and now. I can't have you taken up for pay without a civil-service examination and a training-course but I can give you authority to carry arms and make arrests. Can you take the time off from your regular work?"

"Yes," they said again.

"Good. Raise your right hands and repit after me . . ."

* * * *

" . . . and now you know what will happen to you if you break your oath to the Federation," said Sklar, "we will go on to your orders. Varnipaz, I am thinkink of sendink you to Rio, where is the headquarters of the Gamanovia

Project. Do you spick Portuguese?"

"Enough to travel on the *Viagens Interplanetarias* by myself but not well. It is funny—my fiancée and I have to speak to each other in English or in Portuguese, because she does not know *Sotaspeou*, which is a close relative of *Gozashtandou*, while I do not speak her *lala rakäta-rajhogora* either. When we are married something will have to be done, I suppose. But excuse me, I am wasting your time."

"So," said Reinhold Sklar. "The only eternity is to send you as an *Americano do Norte*. But try not to let people get you to spick English. You have trouble with your consonants and bowels. Graham, you still got to go back to that Churchillian house this ivnink, don't you? And since there may be Osirians in this case we better take a little precaution. If your room is picked up you will both come over to my place. We'll disgust your plans on the way."

An hour later the new deputy constables looked at one another and at their own images in Sklar's mirror. (Sklar had a room in a cheap hotel.) Gordon Graham looked no different, despite the fact that his head had been completely shaved and he wore next to his naked scalp a cap of thin silver disguised by a wig that matched fairly well his original hair.

Varnipaz, on the other hand, was a complete Earthman, his antennae hidden by a flap of false skin that came down low on his forehead. His wig was brown instead of his natural green and bushy enough to hide the points of his ears.

Sklar explained, "Nobody knows how works the pseudohypnosis of the Osirians—whether some kind of ray or what. But it works, that is the main point, and the only protection is this kind of cap. It also gives a *little* protection against blows on the head but don't trust it too far in that direction.

"Now, you got all your orders straight? Remember, Graham, roll with the punch, as they say in fisk-fightink. Don't think you can get word to me

izzily without being caught, at list until the boss thinks he has you under his pseudohypnotic control. And don't try no gallant rescues except as a last resort. Live that kind of think to us. Understand? Good. So lunk!"

Having an hour to kill Graham offered to accompany Varnipaz to the ticket-agency, where the latter was to make a reservation on an airplane for Rio de Janeiro. On the way he asked, "What's this law-course you're taking?"

"Oh, Prince Ferrian has some advanced ideas about law-codes and I am to make myself familiar with the International Basic Code and its origins—English common law, the Code Napoleon, the Japanese Constitution of nineteen hundred ninety-eight, and so on. You know the agreement under which Thoth was admitted to the Interplanetary Council?"

"No," said Graham.

"Since their legal system was below the minimum standards of the I. K., though they were in other respects a highly civilized people, they had to agree to follow the precedents of the International Basic Code in their courts, with such differences as are made necessary by the fact they are bisexual and so forth.

"Now Ferrian thinks that some day we may get a world government on Krishna and apply for admission to the I. K. And when that happens he intends to have the most advanced legal code on Krishna to give him control of the situation. I shall be amused to see how he fits the very democratic Japanese Constitution into his—I suppose you would say benevolent despotism."

THEN Graham queried, "What strikes you most about our Earthly law?"

Varnipaz thought, then said, "I suppose the care with which your constitutions safeguard the individual's rights against the state. Why is that?"

"We had experience with the other kind of state—with unlimited power over the individual—and it didn't work so well."

"What happens if an emergency arises that requires one of these states to exceed its powers?"

"Then you amend the constitution. That's hard to do, though."

"Why?" asked Varnipaz.

"Because the science of geriatrics has more than doubled our life-span, so that our average age is much greater than it was a couple of centuries ago."

"And that makes you conservative?"

"Exactly. What else have you noticed?"

"I notice how carefully the powers of the World Federation are limited. For instance I should think a world government would control migration from one continent to another. But no, that is reserved to the several nations."

"There's a reason for that. Several nations—Brazil, the United States, Australia—were afraid of being swamped with immigrants from countries where they had let their population get out of hand. So the other nations had to agree to get any kind of Federation."

"And from what I understand you had to have a Federation to keep you from blowing up your planet."

"Exactly. Besides, there was a reaction against centralization in government at that time, following the Third World War."

"I see. But law—*chá!* What are a lot of dusty law-books when one's betrothed is in peril? I wish I had those Churchillians on Krishna!" Varnipaz made thrust-and-parry motions.

Gordon Graham left Varnipaz and walked to the subway entrance. Although the Krishnan had apologized handsomely for starting the fight that afternoon, Graham still did not altogether trust him.

Maybe he was a bit too knightly to be true. And was Sklar so smart or had he let himself be glamorized? While Earthmen loved to boast of their democratic institutions they were easily beguiled by extra-terrestrial titles.

When the train bore him away Graham felt as if he had been shut up in one of the Gamanovia Project's maggots

just as the device was about to burrow down into the white-hot substratum of the earth's crust with an atomic charge aboard.

CHAPTER IV

Chest Wigs, Inc.

GORDON GRAHAM'S heart beat faster as he walked towards the old house where the Churchillian Society had met the previous evening. Though he hardly expected to find Jeru-Bhetiru still there, he would at least be definitely on her trail.

What on earth, he wondered, could they possibly want with the Gamanovia Project? This was no secret military undertaking but an open and above-board endeavor to provide more space for the inhabitants of an already overcrowded Earth. He could make no sense of it.

The house, as he remembered, should be in the next block.

In a few minutes he would know or at least be in a position to ask questions. Whether they would answer was another matter. Anybody who deliberately put himself into the power of a group of determined and dangerous men like these, as he was doing, was several kinds of a damn fool.

He felt a rising resentment against Sklar, the W. F. Constabulary and all the other law-enforcement agencies. Why hadn't they stopped this mysterious conspiracy before it got this far? What were they good for, letting a bunch of nogoodniks meet openly to hatch some nefarious plot against the welfare of the world and the peace of ordinary citizens like himself?

And then, instead of dealing with the matter themselves, they roped in an inexperienced amateur like him to do their dirty work for them. They reminded him of these fictional detectives who buzz around busily detecting while the

murderer kills off the entire cast of characters, one by one.

Some of his irritation even spread to include Jeru-Bhetiru. If he hadn't got silly over the girl—if he hadn't let Ivor talk him into getting involved in a situation that was none of his business...

But then his annoyance dissolved in a wave of sentimental tenderness. She hadn't known what she was getting into either, any more than he, so he shouldn't blame her. She was a stranger on a strange planet, while the villains were men of his own species. He was acting like Adam in *Genesis*: "The woman thou gavest me..." He should be ashamed of himself for even thinking such thoughts.

The old yellow clapboard house came into view.

Soon now he would know. And maybe he'd have a chance to rescue her in the best romantic tradition. Or at least he would get word to Sklar and so be the ultimate instrument of her rescue. That is, if they didn't shoot him full of holes first.

Somehow he couldn't see Lundquist, if he had determined to kill somebody, doing anything so stupid as to waste time taunting his victim or telling him his plans while the victim contrived means to escape. Rather, Lundquist would calmly and sensibly blow the victim's head off, saving the talk till later.

Now he was walking up the front steps. The house had the dark eyeless look of an empty domicile. A few bats or owls under the eaves would have been in keeping with the general atmosphere.

He rang the bell, hearing the faint jangle from inside. Then he stood, weight on the balls of his feet, leaning a little forward, his head turned to catch the faintest sound, like a heron wading for minnows.

But no approaching footsteps did he hear. After a while he rang again. Still silence.

What was he supposed to do now, he wondered, burgle the joint? Unfortunately the training for the degrees of

Bachelor of Science and Master of Science in Geophysics did not include instruction in housebreaking.

An automobile purred past on the street behind him. An occasional pedestrian walked by. The darkness deepened. Sounds of city traffic filtered softly into this quiet neighborhood. Kids were yelling somewhere in a nearby block.

A third ring brought no response. Graham was beginning to have the uneasy feeling that he had mistaken the house—though a look at the number showed that he had not. Or that he had dreamed the last night's episode. No—the tender spots on his knuckles, face and elsewhere bore witness to the fights he had been in.

Hands deep in pockets, he slouched gloomily down the sagging front steps and strolled pensively towards the street. It made him feel even sillier, after he had worked himself up to the pitch of courage required to put his head

into the lion's mouth, to learn that the lion had fled.

AT THE street he looked back towards the house, silhouetted darkly against the evening sky, in which stars had begun to scintillate. What now? Report back to Sklar for more orders, he supposed.

"Get in, Graham," said a low voice behind him in a matter-of-fact tone.

Gordon Graham whirled. Behind him, by the curb, stood an automobile—a long gray Ksenzov. Beside the car stood a man. Graham couldn't be sure in the dim light but thought he recognized the small wiry Edwards of the previous night.

"Okay," he sighed and bent his long form to enter the car.

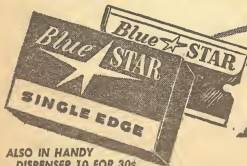
It was a roomy nine-passenger sedan with a couple of men in the rear seat—no poor man's automobile. The attachments for helicopter components showed

[Turn page]

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it to be a convertible.

Graham sat between the two men while Edwards occupied one of the jump-seats. Before Graham had a chance to identify the driver, somebody pushed a button and an opaque partition slid up to cut off that part of the car from his vision. A limousine, no less. The windows seemed likewise to be frosted so that he could not see out.

A feeling of acceleration told him that they were under way, though there was no sound. The car, he thought, must have good maintenance because most automobiles, despite all the engineers could do, developed at least a faint turbine-whine before they had gone many thousand kilometers. The light from the streetlamps bloomed and faded against the frosted windows. The machine banked inwards a couple of times for turns and decelerated to a stop.

Edwards opened the door and slipped out. Graham caught a glimpse of a parking-lot before the door closed again. His two companions sat in pregnant silence on either side of him.

Mechanical sounds from outside suggested that Edwards and no doubt the driver as well were attaching a set of rotors and a tail-boom. There were sounds of speech, muffled by the windows. Graham caught the words, "Check that nut again."

Then Edwards got back in. The vehicle shuddered slightly and the swish-swish of rotors became audible. A slight increase of seat-pressure told Graham they were rising. The lights on the frosted windows died out, leaving the inside of the car in almost complete darkness. Edwards pushed another button that turned on a little red dome-light which shed just enough illumination to see a human shape.

After that there was nothing, except the occasional irregular movement of the car as it met an air-current, for at least half an hour...

A slight bump told Graham that they had arrived. The rotorswish ceased. Again Edwards got out and sounds in-

dicated that the rotors and tail-boom were being taken off. Then Edwards got back in and off they went.

After various turns and twists they stopped again. The door opened into the darkness. Somebody said: "Hurry up, Graham."

He was hustled out of the car and along a concrete walk to an old house of much the same type as that in the Bronx from which he had set out. There was one marked difference, however, instead of sounds of city traffic, from somewhere nearby came the booming of a surf and the smell of sea air.

The house seemed to be one of a rather widely scattered row, facing the street on which the Ksenzov stood. Little patches of sand on the concrete crunched under Graham's feet, while overhead he saw stars but no moon. The lot around the house looked like the unsuccessful result of an attempt to landscape a sand-dune area.

The time was a little after twenty-one hundred. That meant they must have brought him to some point on one of the nearby coasts—which coast, he couldn't yet tell.

The door opened and Graham went in, in the midst of the little group of men. For an instant they clustered in the hall while somebody switched on a light.

Graham found himself leaning against a small table on which stood a table-lamp. The rays of the lamp shone on a brass tray on which lay a small pile of letters. This was an unexpected and unearned break! As the men crowded him past, Graham took a quick look at the topmost letter, the address on which read:

Mr. Joseph Aurelio
1400 South Atlantic Ave.
Bay Head, N. J.

The name Aurelio seemed faintly familiar...

But Graham was given no time to ponder this question for they hustled him upstairs and into a bedroom. They

pulled down the shade and turned on the lights.

"We gotta frisk you," said Lundquist.

They ran their hands over him, removing his knife, keys, watch-telephone—in fact all his petty possessions except his handkerchief and comb.

"Now," said Lundquist, "take it easy and get some sleep. The boss'll be here in the morning. But no tricks, my friend. We still got your guil, you know. And if you want anything, bang on the door."

"Okay," said Graham and they went away.

WHEN they had closed and locked the door to his room he at once began looking around. The bed was a small affair of steel tubing. Damn the people who built short beds! His feet would overhang the end, sure as shooting. There were a rickety chair and a little old bureau, bare of contents—that was all. Nothing to pick locks with even had he known how to pick locks.

He raised the shade and found that on the inside of the window a grille of stout iron bars ran up and down. They were six or seven centimeters apart and bolted to the window-frame at top and bottom. Examination revealed that the nuts which held these bars in place were rusted fast to their bolts and could not be unscrewed without a major operation.

He turned off the light so as to be able to see out. When his eyes became accustomed to the darkness he observed that his one window overlooked the ocean—a calm ocean with mere one-meter combers. To the left a darker mass cut across the beach and extended northward, parallel to the shore-line. As it did not look quite like a boardwalk, Graham concluded it must be the board fence surrounding a nudery.

The thought recalled to him where he had heard the name Aurelio before. A billboard on the Jersey Meadows, which he sometimes saw when he passed on the train, read:

ROYAL CHEST WIGS

Joseph Aurelio, Inc.

Newark, N. J.

The picture on the board showed three bathers at a resort like this one. Two of them were men to whom nature had not given abundant natural hair on the chest, the third was an impossibly curvesome girl. Of the two men, one, resplendent in one of Mr. Aurelio's ROYAL CHEST WIGS, was getting all the attention from the girl while the other lad, lacking both a natural and an artificial pelt, slunk off in disheartened dismay.

This was evidently Mr. Aurelio's summer beach-house. Judging from the permanent look of the bars in the window, the gang were probably using the house with the owner's knowledge and connivance. One more puzzle—what interest could a manufacturer of chest wigs have in Gamanovia?

Did he hope by some skulduggery to wangle an exclusive license for the sale of his product on the beaches of the new continent? If so he was doomed to disappointment. The shores of the new land would be deep-sea rock and ooze for many years to come, not at all nice for bathing.

And speaking of bars, this house did not impress him as much of a place. Old and definitely crumbly. However successful Aurelio might be as a maker of chest wigs he had evidently not laid out a fortune here.

And if it were old and crumbly, perhaps something could be accomplished by main force. Graham grasped two of the iron bars and heaved on them. No, the house wasn't that far gone. The bars refused to give. He could, however, relieve the stuffiness of the indoor air by inserting his hands between the bars to open the window.

Looking out again he saw a figure moving quietly around the front of the house. One of the gang on guard, he supposed.

He made another search of the room for some gadget or gimmick to get him-

self out of his prison when occasion required, but found nothing. The thought occurred to him that, like some old houses, this one might be equipped with glass window-panes. But when he rapped experimentally on the window, the dull sound indicated a methacrylate pane. So there was no hope of even getting a sharp sliver of glass to work with.

Not that he wanted to escape *yet*, before he had found out what the gang was after and whether they had Betty here . . .

At last, lacking anything better to do, he threw himself down on the overshort bed, his head in one corner, his feet dangling off the opposite one. And soon, soothed by the sound of the surf, he slept.

THE next day, soon after he awoke, they brought him a sandwich and a glass of milk for breakfast and stood over him while he consumed them. To his questions Edwards shrugged his shoulders, saying, "You got to wait till the boss gets here."

Afterwards they left him alone, except to look in on him every hour or so to make sure he was not up to mischief.

Lunch was the same. The beach filled up to some extent, though this house seemed to be south of the more densely settled section of Bay Head (toward Mantoloking, if he remembered the local geography) and comparatively few bathers resorted to this part. A few went into the nudity.

However, all were too far away for him to risk trying to call for help, now or later. Against the sound of the surf he'd have to scream his lungs out to attract attention and the gang in the house would probably hear him before the people on the beach did.

Of course it was still pretty early in the season and the water would still be cold even while the air was balmy. There was the usual man surf-fishing all day in hip-boots and not, as far as Graham could see, catching anything. And the youth who broke all the flying-

regulations by buzzing his helicoupe a few meters over the heads of those on the beach.

Gordon Graham, suffering from galloping boredom, napped much of the afternoon. Dinner was a real meal, served like the previous repasts in his room. Not long after dinner, however, faint sounds of new arrivals filtered up through the floor-boards.

The door opened and Edwards said, "Come along."

He followed the small man downstairs to the living-room whose previous occupants were ranged in a circle as though specially to receive him. He recognized the three men whom he had fallen afoul of two nights before—Lundquist, Edwards and Warschauer, the last with his nose in a plaster cast—and two more men whom he did not know.

Finally there were two extraterrestrials—a dinosaurian reptile from Osiris, towering over the rest of the company, with its body painted in an elaborate blue-and-gold pattern—and a furry "monkey-rat" from Thoth, the other civilized planet of the Procyonic System, not much over a meter tall, with seven digits on each limb.

"Here he is, boss," said Lundquist, addressing the Osirian.

"Sso," said the reptile. "Come ant look at me, Mr. Kraham!"

Graham, listening carefully, could just barely make sense out of the whistling accent that mangled half the sounds almost beyond recognition. Trusting to the helmet under his wig, he complied with the order. Presently he found the animal's two great green eyes glaring balefully into his own. His scalp prickled under the silver dome and the room seemed to swim a little.

"Repeat after me," said the Osirian: "I, Kordon Kraham . . ."

"I, Gordon Graham."

"Take you, The'erhiya the Sha'akhfa."

"Take you, The'erhiya the Sha'akhfa."

To be my wedded wife? thought Graham. *God*, what an idea!

"To pe my apsolute master."

"To be my absolute master."

"Until released by him."

"Until released by him."

"Ant will faithfully obey his orders."

"What?" said Graham.

"Ant will faithfully obey his orders!"

To you not understand, stupid one?"

"I didn't the first time—"

"Are you criticising my English?" hissed the being shrilly, showing its crocodile teeth. "I speak perfect English! Not a trace of accent!"

Graham, thinking it better not to argue a point on which the Osirian was evidently touchy, simply said, "And will faithfully obey his orders."

"Efen unto teeth."

"Even unto death."

SO THAT was it! thought Graham. This Osirian must be the one Betty had met at that extraterrestrial clam-bake in Boonton, the one who had passed out surrounded by his oil-canlike drinking vessels. The famous speculator and his partner, the Thothian—what was the name?—Adzik.

Had The'erhiya not drunk himself silly a lot of things might have been different. The Sha'akhfa would no doubt have been present at the meeting of the Churchillian Society, or at least in the background master-minding the procedure. Then the gang would probably not have committed the blunders that had led to the present situation.

Now what was he supposed to do? How did people act under the Osirian pseudohypnosis? All Graham knew was what he remembered of a scene in the movie *Perilous Planet*, in which the heroine, played by Ingrid Demitriou, had been given the works by the villain, played by the eminent Osirian actor Faqhsen.

He therefore put his hands on his head and gave a theatrical groan, as if he had just found a misplaced minus-sign at the beginning of a week's just-completed calculations.

He said, "Mind if I sit down a minute? I seem to have a slight headache."

"That is all right. You will feel better in a short while," said the reptile.

At the end of his minute Graham found them all standing around him expectantly. Then the Osirian squatted in front of him, extended its clawed hands and caught him by the shoulders.

The'erhiya said, "You are Korton Kraham, the cheophysicist of the Kamanovia Procheet, are you not?"

Careful now. "Yes, master. One of the geophysicists, that is."

"Ant you know where these maggots have been planted in the ocean bed, to you not?"

That was public information, spread out before the populace in a hundred popular articles and news-releases.

"Yes," said Graham.

"Well then, I want to know which maggots to fire ant in what order to raise Kamanovia apuff the surface before November twenty-ninth of this year!"

So this was it? But why, *why*? It still made no sense. November 29th was the date on which the World Federation's contract with Teófilo March became effective. So there was doubtless some connection. If the continent were raised before the contract date it would cause some confusion but nothing the W. F.'s lawyers couldn't straighten out.

Anyway he couldn't answer this question offhand. Therefore he said, "I don't know."

"Oh, yes you to," insisted The'erhiya. "You must talk or we shall find means to make you."

Still Graham shook his head. Lundquist remarked, "I guess he means that, boss. He couldn't hold out on you after you've given him the treatment."

"I don't know about that," said Warschauer, the damage to his nose still denasalizing his speech. "Sometimes, when an order contradicts the subject's compulsions and inhibitions too strongly, you'll get resistance to a post-treatment order."

Lundquist said, "I don't know as I follow Artie's fancy language but we can soon enough find out. Just let me give

his arm a good twist."

The'erhya waved a claw. "No, I haff a better method. Ko ket our other kest."

"Oh, I get it," said Lundquist with what Graham took to be a grin of sadistic delight.

Lundquist and Edwards went out and in a few minutes returned, bringing with them a handcuffed Jeru-Bhetiru.

"*Gorodon!*" she cried. "What is this? What are they going to do to us?"

"I don't know, Betty," said Graham. "They want me to give 'em some—uh—dope I haven't got."

"You mean you say you ain't got it," said Lundquist. "Now, you two mursils hold her good and tight. You two, go get that old table out of the kitchen. And the hatchet."

When these articles had been brought Lundquist said, "Okay, my friend, now see if you can't remember how to wolk those maggots. Because every minute you don't I'm gonna chop off one joint of this dame's pretty little fingers until there ain't none left. Ready?"

They mashed her hand down flat on the old table. She screamed. The men paid no attention. Lundquist, a glint of amusement in his eyes, glanced upward. Following his glance, Graham saw that the ceiling was soundproofed. One of the men had quietly brought a pistol out of his pocket in case of emergencies.

Lundquist raised the hatchet.

CHAPTER V

The Nudery

WAIT," said Gordon Graham.

"Yes?" said The'erhya.

Graham's mind had been working furiously. If there were reason to believe that these gloops were out to blow up the Earth or conquer the Solar System or something fantastic like that, maybe he should be willing to sacrifice

both himself and Jeru-Bhetiru.

On the other hand there would be no point in letting her be mutilated to prevent some mere swindle or theft, which he suspected this of being. Of course if he were wrong . . . He put that thought away with an internal shudder. He'd have to use what judgment he could bring to bear upon the situation.

Stall, that was the trick. His next statement would have the advantage of being almost true.

"I said I didn't know," he said, "but I didn't say I couldn't find out. You wouldn't expect me to carry around thirty pages of equations in my head, would you?"

"Ko on, tell us what you mean," said The'erhya.

"I mean that if you'll g-get me my textbooks and log-tables and things I could figure this out in a few days. After all you're asking me for data that took me and a dozen other men a year to work out in the first place."

The Osirian persisted. "Why can you not simply gif us the firing plan of the maggots? What tifference does it make whether the firing is started now or next Octoper?"

"A lot of difference," said Graham. "You have to take the Lunar and Solar tides into account and the periodicity of the magmatic vortices and a lot of other things. That is, if you don't want your continent to sink down again, or if you don't want to drown the coasts of Brazil and West Africa with earthquake waves."

"Fery well," said The'erhya. "Gif him a paper and pencil, Warschauer, so he can make out a list of the things he will neet."

Graham made his list a good one, including not only all the reference-books he might need and his slide-rule but his contour-map of the South Atlantic and his complete set of drawing-instruments.

"Get them out of my apartment," he told them. "Be sure you're there in the middle of a working-day when my brother won't be in. Here's my key."

"Goot," said The'erhiya. "Take our kests pack to their rooms, now."

Watching closely, Graham observed that Jeru-Bhetiru had a room two doors down the hall from his.

* * * * *

It was next noon when Warschauer and a man whom Graham had heard referred to only as "Hank" came in with the supplies he had ordered.

Lundquist followed, saying, "There you are, my friend. Now get to work like a good little boy and don't give us no more trouble or we may have to liquidate you after all."

They stood around as he spread his papers and books out on the table they had provided and went through learned-looking maneuvers. After an hour they got bored and went out, locking the door as usual.

Graham at once began examining his drawing-instruments. Stupid gloops—having once carefully searched him and taken away anything that might be used as a tool they had then willingly given him a whole other set at his own request.

Careful, he told himself—maybe they weren't so stupid at that. Maybe they hoped to pop in and surprise him. In any case they were assuming that The'erhiya's pseudohypnotic treatment and the fact of their holding Jeru-Bhetiru as a hostage would between them render him harmless.

He went to the window, reached through the bars and began feeling around the outside. The house had been finished in stucco so old as to have become crumbly. Maybe if he could dig enough of it away he could remove the entire window-frame—window, bars and all. At least it was worth trying.

He began pecking at the stucco with the sharp point of a drawing-compass. A thin little cascade of pale-gray dust sifted down from the scene of his operations to fan out on the roof below. Graham hoped the gang were not so fussy

about the appearance of Aurelio's house as to notice it.

He had been hacking at the stucco for an indefinite time when it occurred to him that his guards might put their noses into his room any time to check up on him. Since they had taken his watch he couldn't be sure, but in any event he'd better quit for a while—which he was not sorry to do as his arm ached from the strain and the awkward position. Next time he would count his pecks to give himself a rough idea of the time that had elapsed.

He went back to his calculations until one of the men looked in on him again, then resumed his pecking. He now had a deep slot, a span long, in the stucco alongside the window-frame. If he could get that much done each time . . . He got to work again, thanking God for his long arms!

TWO days later the slot ran all the way around the window-frame. Graham grasped the bars and heaved. The whole thing rocked towards him a couple of centimeters with crunching sounds. As it came plaster dribbled down inside the window-frame.

However the frame refused to come any farther. By feeling around outside Graham, who had never before concerned himself with the construction of windows, discovered that the pieces of wood which ran around the outside of the frame would prevent the window from coming any further toward him. They would therefore have to be removed.

Graham, going over his instruments again, decided that his T-square offered the most promising possibilities. The titanium cross-head had fairly sharp ends. Of course the square wouldn't be worth much as a drawing-instrument after being used as a pry-bar but that couldn't be helped. He got to work.

By the next day all four sections of the outer frame had been pried loose, twisted off and drawn back through the bars to be hidden under Graham's mat-

tress. He hoped that the denuded condition of the window-frame would not be too obvious from the outside.

Then he pulled on the bars again. This time the frame came in as far as he wanted it to.

He had been thinking hard what to do when he got the window loose. To make a dash for liberty, trying to find the nearest public telephone to call Sklar—to reach Jeru-Bhetiru to warn her of what he was doing—or to try to get her out too—to make a clean getaway or to 'phone Sklar and then sneak back into his room before they discovered his absence.

He finally decided to make at least an effort to get Jeru-Bhetiru out at the same time he escaped himself. If he went alone and they discovered his escape before he succeeded in bringing the forces of the law down on the place, almost anything might happen.

They might kill the girl for the devil of it. Or she might be killed in the battle. Or they might flee on learning of his absence, taking her with them as they had done from the house in the Bronx.

Graham therefore cleaned up the plaster-dust on the floor and waited until Edwards came for his dinner-tray. Edwards said, "How you coming along with those figures, huh? The boss is getting a little impatient."

"I should have the answers in a couple of days," replied Graham.

LATE that night Graham waited until the man on watch had appeared and then disappeared from in front of the house. Then he heaved cautiously on the bars until the window came out completely. The combination of window-frame and bars was heavier than he had expected, so much so that his muscles stood out in knots from the strain of lowering the assembly gently to the floor.

Fortunately the sound-proofing of the house helped him. If it muffled sounds on their way to his room from elsewhere in the house it also muffled sounds in the

opposite direction.

Then he pocketed his drawing-compass and swung a leg over the window-sill. Luckily for him the slope of the lower roof was a mere 30°, so he felt he could crawl around on it without a lifeline.

Next to his own window another gaped blackly. He wondered if this room were inhabited by one of the gang and if so if the fellow would be watching for him?

There was no way of telling short of putting his head into the room or calling out a challenge, neither of which acts struck Graham as the sort of things a sensible young scientist would do. Therefore he crawled down towards the lower edge of the roof, sprawled like a spider on the shingles, and inched his way past the window.

Still no sound came. His scalp itched from the several days' growth of hair under the helmet but there was no possible way of scratching it through the silver.

He crept back up the slope to Jeru-Bhetiru's window and rapped softly on the glass.

"Gorodon?" came a sharp whisper.

"Yes. T-take this." He passed her the compass. "D'you think you can reach out with it and dig at the plaster when they're not watching, enough to loosen the whole window?"

"I do not know," she said. "Let me try." And she reached out and began pecking as he had done.

It soon became obvious, however, that she had neither the strength nor the reach to do as quick a job as he had done. Moreover the point of the compass had been worn down from the previous operation.

Graham said, "At that rate it'll take six months to get the window loose and I can't stall these bleeps that long."

"Could you not come out every night and dig a little?"

"That would be just as bad. They'd probably catch me in the act sooner or later. In fact the man on watch now

ought to be prowling around the front of the house again any minute."

"What, then?"

They were silent for many seconds. Finally Graham said, "If I could get you into my room, we could both go out my window. I wonder if you could get one of the gang to bring you around?"

"I do not know. That Edwards is not what you call sympathetic."

"Well, maybe—tell him I'm your lover and you're going crazy because you haven't—uh—seen me for days now. P-pour it on thick. Offer him your beautiful alabaster body if need be."

"Offer him my *what*? I thought alabaster was a mineral."

"Never mind. Just use your feminine wiles to the utmost. You know what they are, don't you?"

"I think I do. When should I do all this?" she said.

"The best time would be the middle of the afternoon when there's a crowd on the beach. If we get out my window we'll jump off the roof and make a run for the nudity over there."

"What is a nudity?" she asked.

"An inclosure for folks who prefer to swim without suits. Every beach has one. I hope we can 'phone for help from there and that there'll be enough people around so they won't dare try to chase us or shoot at us."

"Very well. I will try."

Graham might have seized the opportunity to grasp Jeru-Bhetiru's hand, press it to his lips and swear his undying love in the Romeo manner. But it occurred to him that neither his love nor anything else about him would be undying for long if the gang's watchman caught him at his tryst.

Therefore he contented himself with saying simply, "S-swell. Good night."

He crawled back into his own room without incident. He was just heaving the windows back into place when he heard his door being unlocked.

He gave the window a quick heave, driving it home with a resounding thump, and leaped into his chair just

before the door opened. When Warschauer put his head into the room, Graham was poring over his calculations as studiously as could be.

"You all right?" asked Warschauer.

"Uh—yes, sure," said Graham.

"I thought I heard something . . ."

"Maybe you did, but it wasn't in here."

Graham became uncomfortably aware of the plaster-dust that had fallen on the floor below the window as a result of his latest foray, that he had not had time to clean up. Surely Warschauer must see it too. To Graham's overstimulated imagination it stood out like a ton of coal on a snowbank. He avoided looking in that direction.

"Well, okay then," said Warschauer vaguely. He disappeared.

Graham's scalp itched worse than ever but he did not dare take off the helmet to get at it. Not having any of the goo that Sklar had glued it on with he was not sure he'd be able to replace it properly. At least, however, he could take out the splinters that his person had acquired from the roof-shingles.

THE next day crawled along like all the others. After lunch Gordon Graham began cocking his ear for signs that Jeru-Bhetiru had sold Edwards on the idea of letting her visit her supposed lover. Supposed? In the older and purer sense of the word he *was* her lover.

The day, as luck would have it, was overcast, drawing few people to the beach. Shortly after lunch a brief shower drove even these few away. But during the next hour the cessation of the rain and a few wan sunbeams lured some of them back.

Graham would have preferred to wait another day but had no way of getting word to his fellow-prisoner during the daylight hours. He regretted that he had not made the escape attempt contingent on good weather. But then they might hit a rainy spell and delay too long.

The hours crawled past. Still no sign of Jeru-Bhetiru, daughter of Jere-Lägile

of Kātai-Jhogorai.

Then the lock clicked and in came the girl with Edwards right behind her.

"D-darling!" cried Graham, holding out his arms. They went into a clinch and Graham found that the reports to the effect that Krishnans had taken up the Earthly custom of kissing were not at all exaggerated. Graham found that he didn't have to pretend and from the warmth of her reaction he hoped she didn't either. If it were not for more urgent matters he could go on like this all afternoon.

He finally forced himself to look up from the last lingering kiss and said to Edwards, "Why don't you—uh—just wait outside the door for a while?"

Edwards glanced at the bed with a slight smirk, then back at Graham. "Nope, gotta stay with you. The boss wouldn't like it. Anything you want to do, you can do it in front of me."

Oh, yeah? thought Graham, remembering the ancient joke about the Frenchmen who were arguing over the definition of *sang-froid*. While wondering what to do next he felt Jeru-Bhetiru stiffen in his arms. She was looking towards the window with an expression of terror.

"What is that?" she whispered, pushing Graham aside and running to the window. "*Surujo adhiko!* What is happening?"

"What's that?" snapped Edwards, crowding after her.

Graham took in the scene with one all-inclusive glance, then snatched up his drawing-board. Holding it edgewise to lessen its air-resistance he brought the edge down with all his strength on Edwards' red head.

Edwards saw it coming out of the corner of his eye, started to whirl and reach for a shoulder-holster. But too late. The wood met the man's cranium with a sharp splintering sound. As Edwards folded up on the floor Graham saw that the tough board was split by the force of the blow.

He pulled the body out of the way

without bothering to see whether there were still life in it, seized the window-bars. A straining heave, and the window came out.

"Come on," he said softly. "Move quickly but quietly." He slid over the sill of the opening and began crawling down the shingles. "D-don't jump off the edge. Take hold of the gutter with your hands like this, lower yourself to arm's length and let go. You'll only have about a meter to drop."

From the sandy yard of the Aurelio house he caught her as she dropped. Then, hand in hand, they ran down the walk to the beach. On the beach they turned left and raced for the stockade of the nudery.

At the entrance to the nudery they paused to draw a breath and look back at the Aurelio house. There was no sign of pursuit.

"I'm sure somebody in here has a phone," Graham said. "Come on."

The entrance to the inclosure consisted of a passage between two parallel board fences. The passage made an L around the corner of the nudery so that nobody standing outside could see in. They made the turn and found that the inner fence ran on a couple of meters beyond the corner and ended in a counter and a row of lockers. Behind the counter they could see a few sunless sunbathers sitting sadly on the sands.

"Hey!" said the man behind the counter. "You can't go in there with clothes on! That's indecent non-exposure! Gotta leave 'em in these lockers."

"That's all right," said Graham. "I just wanted to fuff—to fuff—"

"You wanted to *what?*" said the man.

"To telephuff—"

He broke off and he and the man stared at one another in mutual recognition. The man was the member of The'erhiya's band whom he knew so far only as "Hank."

Before Graham could even tense his muscles for flight Hank's hand swooped down below the counter and came up again with a pistol. He held this pointed

at the runaways, in such a position that his back hid it from the nuders.

"Not a move," he said. "Just stay where you are." Then he dialled in his own wrist-phone and spoke swiftly. "... well go look ... yeah ... got 'em ... bring a trulp ..."

FIVE minutes later Gordon Graham and Jeru-Bhetiru were being marched back to the Aurelio house by Lundquist and Warschauer, each pointing a scarcely-hidden weapon.

Back in the house they were conducted to the living-room, where The'erhiya and Adzik and the other man whose name Graham didn't know awaited them.

"Well?" said Lundquist. "What about Jim?"

"He iss det," said The'erhiya.

"Huh," said Lundquist. "Well, we'll take it out on these two." He put his pistol on safety and took hold of it by the barrel.

"No!" said The'erhiya. "We still neet him."

But even as the reptile spoke the pistol-butt whipped through the air and hit Graham's head with a muffled but distinctly metallic *bonk*. Graham saw stars and staggered, though the helmet and the thin layer of sponge-rubber inside it saved him from the worst of the blow.

"*Stop it!*" said The'erhiya sharply. "Later, perhaps, but not now!"

Lundquist paused, staring intently at Graham. Finally the man muttered, "Something funny about this wunk's head." He stepped closer and rapped Graham's skull with his knuckles. "Thought so."

He began digging around the edge of the epidermoid with his fingernails until he had pried up enough to get a good grip. After much tugging the helmet came off with sucking sounds.

Graham put a hand to his head. Now at least he could scratch. His scalp bore a short growth of stiff bristly hair, perhaps half a centimeter long and all gooey

from the adhesive Sklar had glued the helmet on with.

"Sso," said The'erhiya. "Now we know why he hass not giffen us any results. Now we have the information from One he could only giff us a last-minute check. Not worth the risk. Kill them."

Lundquist said, "You mean right now? Why not save 'em and have some fun out of it?"

"I to not wish to risk more delay. This man iss dancherous. Stronger than he looks. Shut the wintows and shoot them right now. If it makes you unhappy, I will get you a rabbit to torture."

Graham exchanged an agonized glance with Jeru-Bhetiru. Before he let them simply execute him he'd throw something or sock somebody, even if they killed him in the act. He tautened himself for a spring.

As the men moved to obey the taciturn Adzik piped up, "Wait." Then the Thothian engaged in a rapid conversation in a language unknown to Graham with its reptilian partner.

Finally The'erhiya said, "We haff a better itea. Now he does not have hiss helmet we can use him." The Osirian thrust his scaly muzzle into Graham's face. "Kraham!"

"Yes?" said Graham. The great green eyes really had hold of him now. It was as though everything else in the world had dissolved into gray mist, leaving only those eyes glaring through their slit pupils.

"Repeat after me—I, Korton Kraham ..."

They went through the whole rigmarole again but this time with a difference. As he repeated each phrase, Graham felt invisible but unbreakable handcuffs being snapped shut on his spirit. He had committed himself morally to help these beings and could no more disobey them than an ordinary man could shoot his mother.

"Now," said The'erhiya, "hit her. Hart."

Although Graham wanted nothing less he could no more help himself than one can help blinking at a strong light. He stepped over to Jeru-Bhetiru, drew back his fist and, disregarding her horrified expression, let her have a strong right to the jaw. Down she went, cold.

"You see," said The'erhiya.

"He might still be pretending," said Lundquist sourly.

"No, I can tell." The'erhiya tapped a claw against the scales that covered his bulging cranium. "Now, Kraham, tell us who sent you to us with that thing on your het."

"Reinhold Sklar, World Federation Constable."

"Very well. You will go with my men, who will put you out near the city. Then you will go into the city, find Sklar and kill him. To you understand?"

"I understand." And the worst of it was he did. Given the order he knew he'd kill Sklar the first chance he got, that he'd use whatever stealth or deception needed, that he'd be unable to warn his victim in any way.

"And when you have killed Sklar," continued the Osirian, "you will immediately kill yourself. Is that clear?"

"Yes," said Graham.

They let him out. He did not even look back at the crumpled heap on the floor that was the girl he loved.

CHAPTER VI

Written in Blood

GORDON GRAHAM climbed out of the subway and walked like a remote-controlled robot towards Sklar's hotel in the West Fifties. The dominant half of his mind thought of plans for killing Sklar.

He must be careful, for instance, not to get excited and pump the entire magazine into the constable—because then he would have no shots left to kill

himself with. And when he did kill himself he must remember to shoot himself well back over the ear. People sometimes shot themselves in the temple and blinded themselves without killing.

Meanwhile the rest of his mind, like a prisoner in a cage, raged futilely in vain efforts to regain control of his body, was carried along, a helpless spectator, to witness whatever crimes the body had been ordered to commit. Whatever the Osirian pseudohypnosis was it certainly seemed to work. Foolproof.

Could it be that the other men of the gang were under The'erhiya's control in the same fashion? He knew from what Ivor Graham had told him that Osirians had to promise not to use this uncanny ability of theirs before they were allowed on Earth. But if they broke their promise there was no way of physically sealing up this faculty.

The hotel lay in the next block.

And why hadn't they done the same to Jeru-Bhetiru? Then he remembered reading somewhere that of all the civilized species, human beings were the most susceptible to this influence. Krishnans could be influenced for only a short time . . .

"No," said the clerk at the desk of the Baldwin, "Mr. Sklar isn't in."

"I'll wait," said Graham and sat down in the shabby lobby.

Hours passed.

Still the autonomous part of Graham's mind lunged against the walls of its psychic prison while the other half resigned itself with unwonted calm to waiting for his victim. Although darkness had fallen outside and his stomach was protesting its lack of sustenance he sat there in the motheaten old plush armchair, waiting as quietly as a statue.

Then in came Reinhold Sklar. He saw Graham as quickly as the latter saw him, raised an eyebrow and stepped forward with a hand out.

"Hello there!" he said. "I didn't expect you back so soon. Come on up to my room for a tuck, huh?"

Graham smiled, replied with a me-

chanical, "Hello," and followed the constable to the elevator. This was going to be easy. As soon as the elevator started on its way he would simply take out his pistol and shoot Sklar—several times.

As the magazine held nineteen shots, each with enough power to tear a limb off a man, a few shots should do a good job. Then the muzzle to his right ear, a pull on the trigger and his brains would be spattered all over the inside of the elevator to finish a good job well done.

Stop! Wait! Watch out! shrieked the other part of his mind—but silently. This part of his consciousness could no more affect events than a spectator at a movie could by wishing alter the course of the plot.

The door of the elevator stood open. Graham remembered that he must do nothing to arouse the suspicions of Sklar.

Sklar stood aside and waved Graham in, then stepped in after him and punched the No. 9 button. The doors slid quietly closed and the elevator started up.

Graham drew his right hand, clutching the pistol, out of his pants pocket.

Just before it hit, he was aware of the blurred movement of a blackjack in Sklar's hand, swinging towards his own head with the speed of a striking snake.

HE WOKE up with a terrific headache, as if somebody had sent a miniature Gamanovian maggot boring into his head and then touched off its atomic pile. He also had a taste in his mouth something like the waste from an oil-refinery. He was lying on his back on a cot. When he tried to move his head he became aware of a gadget attached to it by means of wires that limited its motion.

"Now just you lie still," said a female voice and a motherly nurse called, "Mr. Sklar!"

"Comink," said the brisk familiar voice.

The nurse continued, "Just hold still, Mr. Graham, so we can get the psycho-integrator off you." There were metallic sounds and the cap was pulled off his head.

He sat up, almost falling over onto the floor with dizziness. "Wh-what—" he mumbled.

One of Sklar's hairy muscular hands was gripping his shoulder to steady him. With great effort Graham said, "How—how did you know?"

"That crew haircut of yours. I knew right away you didn't have your wig on no more, so I expected something like what happened."

"I n-never thought I'd be glad to have somebody bop me on the bean. Am I suss-safe now?"

"Sure—that's what for is the psycho-integrator. Wonderful mashin. You're in the hospital of the Division of Investigation Headquarters on Lunk Island. But quick now, tell me what happened to you and where the gang is now hidink out?"

Graham furrowed his brow in an effort to think. It all seemed so long ago and far away. "Let me see—Joseph Aurelio's house, something Atlantic Avenue, Bay Head, New Jersey." He told his tale.

Before he had got out more than a few sentences Sklar had dialled his phone and was rattling orders into it.

"G-going to raid the place?" said Graham.

"Yes, sure."

"Let me come too."

"Not you. You're still an invariable—you ain't up to it."

"Oh, yes I am. You forget they've still got my girl."

"Oho. Okus-dokus, come alunk then."

The little squadron of W. F. D. I. automobiles purred slowly over Barnegat Bay, barely visible below as a paler strip against the blackness of the land. Graham could see the other cars only by their flying-lights.

He finished his account of his experiences, saying, "What did I do wrong

this time?"

"You did pretty good, considering. For a man without special trainink you're a pretty keen absorber, which I would not suspect from that dopey absent-minded look of yours. That man in the nudery being a member of the gank was just a bad break.

"I don't think I'd have tried to rescue the girl too but then you are yonk and romantic. One rizzon I sent Varnipaz to South America was that he is too damn romantical for this kind of work."

"Then you don't think he'll accomplish anything?"

Sklar made a rattling noise in his throat. "That gloop? Naw. He don't know his way around Earth good enough, for one think, even if he has been here a couple years. Didn't want an argument, so the easiest way to get rid of him was to send him off chasing wild geeses. But you now, maybe with a few years' trainink and experience we could make a constable out of you. Would you be interested?"

"I doubt it," said Graham. "After all I've put a good many years on getting to be a geophysicist."

"Sure, and you don't want to throw that away. I wish I knew who that 'One' that The'erhiya talked about was. If we knew that—you sure he said 'One'?"

"Yes. At least it sounded like 'One.' Of course with that accent it might have been almost anything to begin with."

"Sure," said Sklar. "You can't expect those lizards to spick good Enklisk, like me for instance, because they ain't got human focal organs. 'One,' huh? Say, how many of the other Gamanovia brains do you know?"

Graham thought. "I know all the scientists on the job here at Columbia and I've met a good many of those at Rio. I was down there last winter and met Souza, the big chief, and Benson and Nogami and Abdelkader and van Schaak. That's all the names I can remember just now."

"You keep trying," said Sklar. "Now here we are. Remember, if we get

close to quarters with this Osirian, don't let him look you in the eyes."

The cars maneuvered with clockwork precision. While three of them hovered over the Aurelio house, the other four dropped into the streets nearby. As the swish of their rotors died away uniformed men issued from them and filed silently around the intervening corners towards the house.

Sklar and Graham followed hard behind the uniformed men. Sklar whispered, "Now don't get excited and shoot one of your own pipples in the back. Very bad for morals. Don't shoot nobody unless to save your life or to kip them from gettink away."

"I won't," promised Graham.

"Now we got to wait," said Sklar. "You'll find the suspension of waitink is much worse than a fight."

Graham waited, heart pounding.

NOTHING happened for at least a quarter-hour. Out of sight around the nearest house the surf boomed lazily. Overhead the rotors of the hovering cars still burbled.

Then a whistle split the silence. At once lights came on everywhere—a searchlight in each of the hovering cars, a parachute-flare, several more lights that had been set up on the ground. Then came a crackle of shots and the sound of smashed methacrylate windows—like the tinkle of broken glass but duller.

Then silence again while the lights still played on the house. Here and there came the sound of windows opening in other houses and voices calling questions into the night.

"What is it?" said Graham.

"Gas," said Sklar, looking at his watch. "I'm afraid our pipples have flown the kite, though. Okay, in we go. Here, stick these up your nose and don't breathe through your mouth unless you want to be laid out cold like a turnkey."

There was a rending of wood as the men broke in the front door. By the time Graham arrived in Sklar's wake

the house resounded, despite its extensive soundproofing, to the tramp of heavy feet, upstairs and down. The lights were already switched on. The gas made Graham's eyes sting.

"Nobody here," said a man in uniform.

For half an hour Graham had nothing to do but keep out of the way of the men, who took impressions of fingerprints, turned over furniture and otherwise busied themselves in the search for clues.

He said to Sklar, "Say, it just occurred to me they might have—er—booby-trapped the house."

Sklar, puffing his usual cigarette, shrugged. "Sure, we all knew that when we first came in. Got to teck chances in my business sometimes, you know."

Graham, increasingly bored and restless, wandered upstairs. The body of Edwards had been removed, though when, whither and by whom Graham did not know. His broken drawing-board still lay where he had dropped it.

He strolled into the room that had been occupied by Jeru-Bhetiru. Perhaps he could find some trace of her that had been overlooked by the W. F. troopers.

But this room was as bare of tangible relics as all the others. The bed had been tipped up against the wall and the rug thrown back by the searchers, who had then gone on to other business.

Graham gave the room a good look-over nevertheless. When he examined the floor a slight streaky discoloration on the part that had been covered by the rug drew his attention.

By moving his head until he got a highlight from the room's one light-bulb to coincide with the discoloration, he saw that it consisted of a word written on the floor with some pigment almost but not quite the same as the color of the boards. The word was:

RIO

"Hey, Sklar!" yelled Graham. "Come here!"

Sklar saw it at once and stooped closely over it, playing a pocket flashlight on the stains.

"Blood," he said. "Your girl-friend must have cut herself and written this for us to find. Good kid. Hey, who was in charge of searchink this room?"

After a pause a very large trooper explained in a very small voice, "I was, sir."

"Your name?" said Sklar ominously.

"Schindelheim, Trooper, first class."

"That," said Sklar, "will go on your fitness report. What is it now?"

"Mr. Sklar," said somebody else, "one of these local cops has put tickets on all our cars for parking in the street with rotors attached."

Sklar made an impatient motion. "You take charge and take care of that, Roth. We're goink back to the city and then on to Rio. Come, Graham. How lunk will it take you to pack for a trip to South America, huh? Can you mit me at the airport at sixtin hundred tomorrow? Good."

CHAPTER VII

Chinese Rhinoceros

AS THE airliner banked with the ponderous aerial dignity of a condor the great bay of Guanabara came into view through the window at which Gordon Graham sat. Although he had been to São Sebastião do Rio de Janeiro before, Graham never failed to get a thrill out of the approach to the world's most beautiful metropolis.

Below and in front of them the bay spread out like an immense fan, with clusters of islands in the foreground and behind them the scalloped line of sub-bays. Then the city, running along the edge of the scallop and trailing off into the valleys extending up into the mountains like the teeth of a comb. As the 'plane dropped lower the Corcovado

and other peaks thrust themselves up against the skyline.

Even Reinhold Sklar, whom Graham would have thought to be about as aesthetically sensitive as one of Teófilo March's turtles, said, "Boy, ain't that somethink!"

Now the white line of the beach could be made out and back of it the sharp diagonals of the avenidas with their rows of shining skyscrapers. Before them the vast airport thrust out into the bay like a welcoming hand. As they sank towards it the map effect flattened out of sight.

Graham found he was confronted by a solid wall of buildings, throwing back the pinkish-white light of the rising sun, below them the green of the seashore parkways, along which he could see the movement of thousands of shiny dots—automobiles. In another traffic-lane to their left convertibles were buzzing in to the airport to leave their rotors, like queen-ants shedding their wings, while their owners drove them to work.

The landing 'chute blossomed behind them and they drew up to the ramp. As they walked down the companionway and into the reception building they met a tall broad-shouldered bushy-haired smiling young man with a rather Oriental look. After a moment of uncertainty Graham recognized Varnipaz bad-Savarun, still in his Earthly disguise.

Shaking hands, Varnipaz asked, "Have you eaten yet?"

"No," said Sklar. They went into the restaurant and ordered.

"Well," said Sklar, "what have you found out, pal?"

Varnipaz said, "I reported to headquarters as you ordered me. Then I tried to follow the logical course. If the gang used a cult for a cover in North America it seemed to me that it might use a similar organization in South America.

"Therefore I have been going around the city attending the meetings of all the queer little societies and cults—the Cosmotheists, the Brazilo-Israelites, the

Hindu Center of Absolute Truth, the Society for the Abolition of Coffee and so on." He shook his head. "You Earthmen may call us Krishnans backward but you have some of the most irrational . . .

"Well, anyway, I have membership lists of several of them." He brought out a thick mass of papers. "I thought that if you could compare the membership of these with the list of engineers and technicians employed on the Gamanovia Project you might find something."

"I apologize to you," said Sklar, leafing through the papers.

"For what?"

"For sayink you'd never make a W. F. constable. Your name ought to be Sherlock bad-Holmes. Any time you want to sign up for the candidate school—here, Graham, you know who's who on the project."

"I don't know all of 'em," said Graham, "but I'll glance through these anyway." He too began running down the lists and presently exclaimed, "Homer Benson! Why, old Homer's the second man to Souza. I know him w-well. That is, if this is the same Benson."

"It probably is," said Sklar. "There wouldn't be many men with a name like that in Rio. What list is that?"

Graham looked at the heading. "Soci—how do you pronounce it?"

Sklar looked. "*Sociedade Homagem ao Cortereal*. Society for Homage to Cortereal. Who's he?"

Varnipaz said, "João Vaz Corte-Real, an explorer some people here think discovered the Americas before Columbus. They take it very seriously, though why anybody cares, when as I understand some Norwegian found the continents long before either, I fail to comprehend."

Sklar asked Graham, "Any more project pipples on that list?"

Graham sat in silence, running down the list. When almost at the end he said, "I think I recognize two here—Vieira and Wen."

"Who are they?"

"Gaspar Vieira is one of the local people, a chemist, and Wen Pan-djao is a Chinese mathematician. I met 'em both when I was down last year. I don't really know them though."

Sklar drummed with his fingers on the table-top. "Come on, you two. I should go through the local poliss but we ain't got the time."

They piled into a taxi. Sklar directed the driver to the Gamanovia Building on the Praia do Flamengo, out toward Botafogo Bay. As they rolled he told Graham, "Kip lookink through those lists. There might be others."

One of Rio's notorious traffic-jams held them up for half an hour, enabling Graham to complete his scrutiny. He said, "I d-don't see any more but that doesn't prove anything. We need the complete list of employees from Gamanovia's Personnel Department, to check against all of these."

"Hokus dokus," said Sklar. "Here we are."

THEY piled out, gave their names at the registration desk and a few minutes later were in Souza's office. Meanwhile Souza's private secretary and six other girls were going over the lists in the adjoining room.

While waiting Souza and his visitors engaged in small-talk. Graham had great difficulty in following this, for while Sklar's Portuguese was fast and fluent if badly pronounced and that of Varnipaz was, like his English, painfully correct and formal, Graham could only read the language and speak it a little. When somebody rattled a string of nasal vowels at him he was helpless.

Presently Souza's secretary came back with the pile of papers. "Senhor Paulo," she said, "we found the name of Senhor Gjessing on the list for the Mechanisophical Society."

"What?" said Sklar.

Varnipaz explained. "Those are the ones who worship the Machine. You should go to one of their services—an altar with a machine on it, all wheels

and levers and colored lights. As far as I could see it does nothing but go round and round while they kneel and pray to it but somehow it works them into a state of ecstasy. You Earthman—"

"Is that all?" said Sklar.

"That is all," said the secretary.

"Good. That little metapolygraph in my suitcase has attachments for only four people. Senhor Paulo, will you get Senhores Benson, Gjessing, Vieira and Wen?"

While these employees were being summoned Sklar busied himself setting up his metapolygraph. He asked Souza, "You don't mind if I put the box on your desk?"

"So—no."

"*Obrigado*. I hope this will crack the case because nothing short of deep hypnosis can beat this little machine."

One by one the experts appeared. Benign old Benson doddered in and after him the hulking Wen with his perpetual grin. Then fat little Vieira and lastly a bald man with a handlebar mustache whom Graham did not know.

Souza introduced each one as he arrived. "These are Mr. Sklar, Mr. Graham and Mr. Muller,"—for that was Varnipaz's alias. When the last man appeared he introduced him as "Dr. Gjessing," pronouncing it "zhessing" as if it had been Portuguese.

The owner of the name promptly corrected his boss by murmuring "yessing."

Wen's perpetual grin widened. "Roald always wants us to pronounce him as in Norwegian," he said. "I have given up trying to make people pronounce my name. It is really 'wun' but they all insist on saying 'wen.'"

"Then why do you spell it 'wen'?" asked Vieira.

"Because in Chinese the 'eh' sound is always 'uh' except when it follows or precedes an 'ee' sound."

Sklar cleared his throat in a marked manner and broke in with, "Now, gentlemen, we'll discuss the science of fanatics later. With your permission I am going to attach this metapolygraph to

you and ask you some questions about an urgent matter.

"You understand that you don't have to answer or even put on the attachments. But as loyal employees of the World Federation I'm sure you want to coöperate, don't you?" The last words held the faintest hint of menace.

There being no objections, Sklar fastened the leads of the machine to the four men's heads, wrists and ankles. Then he sat behind Souza's desk and began asking questions.

"Do any of you know anything about a group, headed by extraterrestrials, that wants to interfere with the Project?"

Graham, craning his neck a little, could see that the needles on the four dials remained steady as the men answered "Não" in turn.

"Have you ever been in contact with with a group?"

"Não."

"Do you know of *any* secret group opposed to the Gamanovia Project?"

"Não."

"Have you heard of any plan for firing the maggots ahead of time?"

"Não."

STILL no telltale movement of the needles. After half an hour Sklar gave up and removed the attachments.

"Wrong track," he said. "Looks as if the next person we'd have to interview would be Teófilo March, the turtle man. Would he be on Ascension Island now?"

"Oh," said Souza, "you will not be dealing with Senhor March."

"Why not? Is he dead?"

"No, he has sold out. An *Americano do Norte* named Aurelio bought the Rock and March's contract along with it. I believe March keeps his turtle-farm, as the cable-employees keep their farms on Green Mountain but—"

Sklar's sharp glance crossed that of Graham, in whose mind a sudden light shone. "*Hey!*" said Graham. "This is the man they t-t-t . . ."

"Try again," said Sklar.

"T-t-t . . ."

"Whistle it."

"The man the gang was talking about. You remember they said they'd heard from One? They meant Dr. W-wen, of course, since that's how he pronounces—"

"Stop him!" yelled Sklar, reaching for his holster.

They might as well have tried to stop a rhinoceros. The big Chinese straight-armed Gjessing out of the way and plunged through the door, slamming it behind him. As they rushed for it they heard his feet pounding along the corridor. They got it open just in time to see him disappearing around a corner.

"He seems to be headed for the control-room," said Souza.

Graham, the youngest man present, outran the others. He knew where the control-room was from his previous visits. They tore along the corridor, around a couple of bends and up a single flight of stairs.

The control-door was both closed and locked when they got to it. "Who's got a key?" snapped Sklar.

Souza arrived late, puffing like an asthmatic porpoise, and produced a key. It worked the lock but the door, when they tried to open it, moved a centimeter or two. Inside they could hear furniture being dragged across the room and placed against the door.

Then came a loud clank. Souza cried, "*Mãe do Deus*, he's throwing the maggot switches!"

Sklar said, "Gordon, you and Gjessing are the biggest. You push."

Graham and Gjessing threw their shoulders against the door, which moved a few centimeters more. Inside another switch went *clank*.

"Again," grunted Gjessing, and under the impact the door opened a little wider.

"Duck," said Sklar, thrusting his pistol through the crack. Graham, rubbing his battered shoulder, got out of the way.

There was an earsplitting report and the sound of a falling body.

WHEN they finally got the door open Wen lay in a pool of blood in front of the panel on which were mounted the two hundred-odd firing-switches. Three of these had been thrown, their handles projecting down instead of up.

Sklar said, "Will it do any good to push those handles up again?"

"No," said Souza. "The reaction is irreversible and once it is started the heat of the pile destroys the control equipment. It will keep firing until after a few days the heat finally destroys the automatic feed-mechanism too."

Sklar, not listening to the latter part, was bending over Wen, who seemed to be trying to say something. Graham, listening carefully, heard, "It was not my fault. I was to throw all the switches ahead of time . . ."

"That's why your metapolygraph didn't work," said Graham to Sklar. "You said a deep hypnosis would beat it. Well, the Osirian pseudohypnosis has a similar—"

"Sh!" said Sklar, still listening. "Where are they now?"

Wen murmured, "On Ascension—March's buildings—stop them . . . *Duei bu chi, ching . . . Wo bu yau shi . . . Wei-shien . . .*" The voice trailed off to nothing.

"Dead," said Sklar. Then to Souza, "What effect will those switches have?"

Souza and the other engineers had been comparing the numbers on the switches with those on the huge chart on the opposite wall, which showed the locations of all the Gamanovian maggots buried deep in the substratum below the Atlantic Ocean. Other people, attracted by the shot and the commotion, were crowding in the corridor outside. Vieira kept them out.

Benson said, "Offhand I'd say it would cause the bottom to drop east of Ascension."

"How much?" asked Sklar.

Graham shrugged. "As Doc Benson says, we'll have to c-calculate. Fifteen meters, maybe."

"And what will that do?"

"Cause a tsunami, I should think."

"What's a tsunami?"

"Earthquake wave." Graham and Varnipaz suddenly looked at one another in mutual understanding. "Betty—"

"Well," said Souza with a shrug, "if these people are on Ascension let us warn the people of the neighboring coasts and then wait until the wave has passed. If it drowns them, so much the better, though after all Green Mountain rises to nine hundred meters and no tsunami could submerge that. What is that English saying about being blown up with one's own bomb?"

"Hoist with his own petard," said Graham.

Sklar shook his head. "In the first place we'd have to warn the cable-employees of Georgetown, who are not to blame for this. Second, the gang has a hostage with them, a friend of my two deputies here. And for what they've done for me I've got to help save her. When will this wave come along?" He looked from face to face.

A Rio city policeman appeared, pushing his way through the crowd outside.

"Can't tell accurately," said Benson. "Not sooner than six hours and not later than forty-eight from now. If the maggots had been fired in their normal order instead of three at once there wouldn't have been any sudden drop."

Sklar and the city cop were waving credentials at each other and arguing. Presently another uniformed gendarme appeared to join in with gestures.

Sklar silenced his colleagues long enough to say to Graham in English, "These blips will kip me tied up for hours while they untangle the red tapes. You and Varny are deputy constables. Go find Colonel Coelho and make arrangements to fly us to Ascension with a platoon of polisssmen."

"Who's he?" asked Graham.

"Chif of the city polisss. I know him."

"But look, w-wouldn't it be better to get—uh—some of your own World Federation people?"

"No. In the first place the nearest W.

F. base is at Bahia. In the second the Constabulary hasn't got the equipment for an attack like that. The Armed Force has but it comes under the World Ministry of Defense, while we're part of the Division of Investigation of the Ministry of Justice. And Defense is always trying to take us away from Justice and swallow us up themselves.

"So we don't like itch other and it would be almost as much trouble as to get help from the Brazzies. Now go on, hurry, if you want to save your little blue-haired girl-friend."

Although the city police seemed disinclined at first to let these two witnesses go, Sklar overbore their objections by sheer lung-power.

CHAPTER VIII

An Awful Lot of Coffee

GRAHAM and Varnipaz pushed their way out through the crowd and hurried down to the ground floor. They flagged a taxi and on their way back downtown to the City Office Building they agreed that Graham should captain the party because he was wiser in the ways of Earthly bureaucracy, while the Krishnan should do the talking because of his superior command of the language.

Their W. F. identification cards got them into Colonel Coelho's outer office, where they sat for half an hour before being admitted.

Colonel Coelho, a stout balding man in horn-rimmed glasses, seemed first unable to understand what they were getting at. When they had gone over the whole story—how the gang had infiltrated the Gamanovia Project and caused one of the scientists to fire the maggots prematurely and so on—he seemed shocked by the idea that they had come to him at all.

"Why," he said, looking something

like an affronted owl, "my dear young men! I have no jurisdiction on Ascension! And moreover my airplanes are little putt-putts without the range required. While I have great esteem for the Senhor Reinhold he must be mad to think I could undertake such an assignment."

Graham and Varnipaz looked at one another.

"The man you want," continued the colonel, "is my respected colleague, Commander Schmitz of the Federal District Police. I will give you a note to him. You will find him in the Federal District Building."

"*Perdon*," said Graham, "but is that the same as the Federal Police?"

"Ah, no—not at all. This is the Federal District, like your District of Columbia. In it lies the city of Rio de Janeiro but the city does not occupy the entire district, which therefore has its own police. Make myself clear?"

They thanked Coelho and went to find the Federal District Building. After getting lost a few times in the many little alleys that wandered off from the magnificent boulevards they found the building in question and settled down to wait in Commander Schmitz's office.

This time it took forty minutes. They had time to read clear through a newspaper that Graham went out and bought before they were admitted to the presence.

Commander Affonso Schmitz, a little terrier of a man with grizzling red hair, listened to their story and barked, "Coelho must be out of his head to send you to me! Not only have I no authority for any such enterprise but also my budget for the year has been cut to where I can barely perform my assigned duties.

"Young men, you have no idea how hard it is to police the mountainous country around Rio with my little force. If you could persuade those pinch-mill-rés in the legislature—but I suppose there is no time for that. I am vexed with Coelho for dumping such a fantas-

tic problem in my lap. I know! Go see Commodore de Andrada of the Rio de Janeiro State Police. If anybody can help you it should be he. I will write a note . . ."

"Excuse me," said Graham, "but is this something different from both the Rio city police and the Federal District Police?"

"So—yes! We have a city of Rio and a state of Rio, just as you have a city of Washington and a state of Washington and the one is not inside the other—though in our case the State of Rio de Janeiro lies all around the Federal District that contains the City of Rio. Here . . ."

As it was now past noon they were getting hungry. Graham and Varnipaz stopped at a coffee shop for a roll and a cup of coffee before proceeding to the Rio de Janeiro State Office Building.

Graham remarked, "If we don't get somewhere soon the tsunami will be all over with."

Varnipaz nodded gloomily as they plodded towards their next destination. This time they waited in the outer office for nearly two hours while the Commodore took his afternoon nap.

When they were finally admitted, they found Commodore de Andrada to be a slim, elegant-looking oldster with a carefully tended white mustache. He listened with his head cocked and a sympathetic expression on his face.

When they finished he replied, "Ah, it breaks my heart and wrings my soul not to be able to help you. And such a romantic situation too! Two brave young men, flying to rescue the princess from the far planet! Were I but younger I would throw in my lot with yours. As it is, however, to my infinite regret, I must refuse you.

"You see I should have to get the approval of the State Legislature. In the first place they are not now in session. In the second, even if they were, it would take weeks to push through such an authorization. In the third the Liberal Party is now in control, whereas I am

known to be of the Socialists and they would like nothing better than an excuse to—but I think you follow me.

"However, do not look so downcast. If you will come back next month when they are in session, I, Luiz de Andrada, will risk his future and sponsor a special appropriation."

"I'm afraid that would be too late," said Graham.

"Ah, you *Americanos do Norte*—always in a hurry! You do not know how to live. You should stay here a while and learn from us. But do not despair—no true Brazilian ever turned the stranger from his gates or proffered him a stone when he needed bread. I will write you a letter to General Vasconcellos of the Federal Police."

"Beg pardon," said Graham, "but is that different from the Federal District Police? We've already been there, you know."

"Oh, but surely it is different. The Federal Police are the national organization. They are what would be the Armed Forces if individual nations were allowed to keep armed forces any more . . ."

HOWEVER General Vasconcellos kept them waiting a mere twenty-five minutes, and turned out to be a stocky Negro with a serious expression. A handsome young aide, Lieutenant Manoel Gil, according to the sign on his desk, sat across the room from the general.

When Varnipaz had told their story for the fourth time, General Vasconcellos said, "Since you have already been to Coelho, Schmitz and de Andrada, I suppose this is your last stop in Brazil. Now I should like to assist you but . . ."

Here we go again, thought Graham.

"But," said General Vasconcellos, "I don't like the idea of landing my men on the Rock just as this earthquake wave is due. If it drowned them . . ."

"That's unlikely, sir," said Graham. "Tsunamis rarely run over thirty meters high and the island is much higher than that."

"But one cannot be sure, as this is the first man-made earthquake wave. And remember, this hostage is not a Brazilian citizen—in fact not even a Terrestrial. While I sympathize with the young lady and my men are brave, imagine the political capital my enemies would make of my causing a score of Brazilians to be killed for the sake of one extra-terrestrial!"

"But—" said Graham.

Vasconcellos held up a hand. "I know what you are going to say but I fear I can do nothing. Ascension Island is not under Brazilian jurisdiction."

"Brazil handles the mail for it."

"But that is not sovereignty. When the March contract is fulfilled the sovereignty of the island will revert to the World Federation until the land is reclaimed and settled. In the meantime Ascension is an independent nation. Nobody could stop Senhor March from selling it to the Martians if he wished, except that he has already contracted to sell it to you gentlemen."

Graham and Varnipaz sat in gloomy silence until Varnipaz said, "Since the island was originally British I should think Great Britain would have a certain responsibility for it whether the British want it or not. Could we, therefore, fly to Britain for help? Which way is it from here?"

Graham shook his head. "It's a third of the way around the Earth and they'd give us the same sort of runaround."

"I must say," said Varnipaz, "I am getting a poor opinion of this so-called civilized planet. Brazil will not help us for this reason—Great Britain for that—the World Federation for another. If this were Krishna I should organize my own expedition. In fact I should do it here except that there is no time."

AT THIS point the handsome young Lieutenant Gil spoke up, addressing his chief in such fast Portuguese that Graham could not understand a word of it.

After Gil finished Vasconcellos said,

"Perhaps all is not lost, senhores. My aide here has reminded me that we have to make training flights anyway and that we were about to send one of our large rescue-planes on a long flight over the ocean for navigational practise. Now if you and Senhor Reinhold would care to risk an attack on the island by yourselves we could drop you by parachute—"

"That will suit me," said Varnipaz.

Graham found the prospect of attacking a group of he didn't know how many men—perhaps a score—an alarming one. But since he could not let his rival outdo him in gallantry he nodded.

"And me too!" exclaimed Gil. "I want to volunteer for this expedition! I am tired of papers—I am tired of reports—I am tired of this filthy routine. I want to see some action before I die. *Por favor*, General . . ."

"*Panciencia*, my little one," said Vasconcellos. "If this plan goes through you shall have your chance. Could you be ready to leave by tomorrow noon?"

"Too late," said Graham. "Why not tonight?"

The general looked at his watch. "That would take some doing but perhaps we can manage it. I know—we can drop you tonight and then return tomorrow morning to pick you up if you are still alive and the island has not been all washed away."

"I have it! If an earthquake wave hits the Rock we can land some of our men there as a humanitarian act to relieve the victims of a natural catastrophe. Our authorization extends to such emergencies."

Graham asked, "Then why couldn't you land men there before the catastrophe to forestall it?"

Vasconcellos shook his head. "Not legal, I grieve to say. My predecessor got in trouble with the legislature for doing just that. But we will do what we can. Let me see—you will need some equipment but I cannot just hand you a few thousand contos' worth of life-rafts, guns and the like.

"What I can do is to give you a contract with the Office of Research, under which they will lend you the equipment on your promise not only to return it if possible but also to write technical reports on how it worked. Is that agreeable?"

Graham and Varnipaz nodded.

"Good," said Vasconcellos. "Gil, take these visitors to the office of the Quartermaster General and see that some competent officer is assigned to help them choose equipment. Then draw up an engineering test contract and walk it through the Office of Research.

"It is an order that nobody in this building goes home tonight until the last paper is signed. That ought to get results. And call Captain Dantas about that navigation flight. I want these people delivered on the Rock before tomorrow morning."

CHAPTER IX

The Rock

LIEUTENANT Manoel Gil squinted through the infra-red viewer of the machine-gun and said, "Have you gentlemen ever done rotochute jumps before?"

"N-no," said Graham, thinking he need not add that he hoped never to again. Although he considered himself and justly as quite an accomplished athlete, jumping out of airplanes had never attracted him.

So far everything had gone according to schedule. At times, though, he had to confess to a secret wish that the plane would break down or the red tape get fouled up to prevent the expedition from setting out at all. At the same time he burned to rescue Jeru-Bhetiru and the conflict of emotions made him most unhappy.

And here he was, in borrowed Brazilian Federal Police boots, shirt and pants, crouching in the dimly-lit fuselage

of the plane, watching Gil check over the other borrowed equipment and listening to the monotonous whine of the engines.

"Then," said Gil ominously, "you had better precede me so I can make sure you jump."

Sklar looked at his watch. Graham wondered if Sklar's face, which he could see only dimly, was as pale as his own felt.

"When are we due?" asked Sklar.

"Any time now," said Gil. "Remember, we must all go out in a hurry or we'll be scattered all over that filthy island and never find each other. Do you all know your maps?"

Graham took another look at his. Georgetown lay on the northwest coast south of that northern peninsula. On the east side of the peninsula a pencil-mark showed where Teófilo March had his turtle-farm. They would try to drop on the east coast about a kilometer south of this point.

Graham said, "As I understand it you're going to cache the raft on the east coast. That's the windward side, since it's in the p-path of the southeast trades. Wouldn't it be better for us to try to take off from the lee side?"

Gil shook his head. "No. There is something about the bottom formation on the west side of Ascension that gives the worst rollers you ever saw. Three—four meters high. It would take a trained coast-guard crew to get through them."

"Then why did the British put Georgetown on that side?"

Gil shrugged. "I suppose because it was the only place they could find near enough to fresh water and at the same time to a good landing-place. The Rock is a lousy island to land on from the sea—beeg jagged pieces of lava under the water and little rocky beaches from which you have to scramble up cliffs to get to the interior. I think it would have been better to give it back to the terns and the turtles."

The squawk-box chattered in Portuguese and Gil said, "The Rock is in sight. Let us get ready."

They stood up and assumed their equipment. Every one of the four buckled on a pistol and a rotochute. In addition Gil took the machine-gun with the sniperscope attached, Sklar a paralyzer, Graham an extra infra-red viewer and some extra ammunition for Gil, Varnipaz a bagful of explosives and pyrotechnics. Moving awkwardly under their loads they wrestled the large bag containing their life-raft back to the door.

"We have a couple of minutes," said Gil. "Arraez is going to circle once before the drop."

Graham leaned against the nearest window and put his hands around his face to cut out reflections from inside the airplane. Up ahead, to the northeast, a dark shape on the water was cutting into the path of moonlight reflected on the sea from the recently-risen half-moon.

As his eyes got used to the dark, Graham saw that Ascension Island was much bigger than he had thought from the nickname of "the Rock"—though it was impossible to judge sizes accurately from an airplane at night without some familiar object to give a scale of reference. He remembered from his work on the Gamanovia Project that the island was somewhere between ten and fifteen kilometers in its maximum dimension.

The whine of the engines had dropped to a whisper as they glided toward the northern peninsula. To starboard Graham thought he saw a twinkle of lights against the blackness. That would be Georgetown. There had been some question about how to warn the handful of cable-operators who lived there.

A general broadcast about the approaching tsunami might be picked up by the gang and serve to alert them. Then Graham had thought of letting them know by cable with a warning not to tell the folk at the turtle-farm. The Georgetownians should by now have fled with their household goods to higher ground.

About there, thought Graham, should be March's turtle-farm. Far away to starboard Green Mountain reared itself

against the stars as they dropped lower, then swung forward as the plane turned south.

"Get ready," said Gil. "Remember, even if I'm boss now, as we reach ground you, Constable Sklar, are in command."

ONE of the crew-members stood with a hand on the door. Gil stared at his wristwatch. A sharp whistle came out of the squawk-box and the crewman yanked the door open. At once the plane was filled with draft and with the swish and whistle of the airstream outside.

Gil motioned Graham to give him a hand with the raft. They braced themselves, hands against the bundle, and waited.

The squawk-box whistled twice. "Out with it!" said Gil and they pushed. Overboard went the bundle. Graham almost fell out the door and instinctively caught the door-jamb to stop himself—and was catapulted out by a violent push in the small of the back. As he fell into the dark and the gale he caught Gil's voice faintly above the air-sounds. "You next . . ."

For a heart-stopping second he was too frightened to do anything but tense all his muscles as if with violent cramp, while the universe spun around him. Then he remembered to pull the ring. The blades of the rotochute opened like the petals of a flower and the universe stopped whirling as he came right side up.

The great wind ceased blowing up from underneath him and its roar in his ears was replaced by the gentle whirr of the blades over his head. To one side and below him the moonlight caught the larger blades of the chute that was lowering the raft.

He looked toward the airplane, now invisible except for its fast-receding running-lights. He could however hear its engines starting up again. Somebody blinked a flashlight in the air on a level higher than his.

Somebody else called, "Hey—you there, Varnipaz? You there, Graham? Everythink all right?"

They called back and forth until all were identified. Graham, looking down, got another shock. They seemed to be dropping into the Atlantic Ocean.

"Hey!" called Graham. "Gil! We're going into the drink!" And he began wondering how he could swim ashore, laden as he was. He was a good swimmer but hardly a porpoise.

"The wind will carry us ashore," said Gil. "I only hope Arraez allowed enough for windage or we shall have to drag that filthy raft a long way to the beach. Remember what I told you about alighting. The Rock is the best place for breaking the legs you ever saw."

The beach, marked by the phosphorescence of the breakers, slid up slantwise towards them as the wind bore them shorewards. Graham saw that it was, in fact, going to carry them inland. He got his flashlight ready for the landing. The sound of the surf below grew louder.

The beach slid under him and from the dark below came the crunch of the raft-bundle striking the shingle. Graham flashed on his light, directing the beam downwards. The rough surface rose steadily towards him, hummocks of lava enlarging until individual stones and pebbles could be seen in the beam. He flexed his legs to take the shock, jarred home and fell on his back. The rotocute crashed against the rock.

"Ouch!" he muttered. A sharp piece of rock had bitten into his left forearm though otherwise he did not seem hurt. He freed himself from the chute and scrambled up.

As he did so the other three came down with a similar racket, one by one. Graham could hear them moving about in the dark and uttering a powerful symphony of curses—Gil in Portuguese, Varnipaz in Sotaspéou, Sklar in what Graham guessed to be Slovakian or something of the sort.

Sklar said, "I came down on a goddam cactus! Here, all of you follow me to the beech. Kip the talk down."

Graham found the warm wet wind, unnoticeable while he was borne along with

it, now strong enough to ruffle his hair and his clothes. At least the sound of wind and wave would cover their approach. The place smelled of terns' nests.

By the light of their torches they finally got together and picked their way down a little ravine that opened on the beach. It was hard going, requiring a hand as well as a pair of legs as they slipped and crunched over the rough stuff and around the boulders.

AT THE foot of the cliff they found the raft bundle. Sklar and Gil broke it out and after a muttered consultation the latter turned the valve that inflated the raft. The carbon dioxide hissed gently from its cylinder and the raft humped up like a live thing, its folds popping open audibly as the gas filled them.

"I don't like doink this in advance," said Sklar, "but when we get back maybe there won't be no time to blow it up. Let's tie it fast so it don't float away on the tide."

When the painter had been secured to the nearest rock of convenient size they unzipped the outboard motor from its compartment.

"Better set it up too," said Sklar. "We'll want all the spid we can get."

Gil accordingly installed the motor, its propeller-shaft sticking out behind the raft like a tail. Meanwhile Sklar said, "You two, how about pulling some of those spines out of my pants, huh? I don't feel like rescuink no dame with my tail full of niddles."

Graham and Varnipaz obliged with the light of their flashlights. Varnipaz said thoughtfully, "I should like to know more about our legal status. I can see how you and Graham and I are authorized to make arrests by Earthly law, though I do not understand why we do not have to have warrants. And as for Gil . . ."

"Ouch!" said Sklar. "We'll kip the lecture till later."

Gil said, "The motor's ready."

"Come alunk," said Sklar, leading the way north along the beach. The going

was easier here until the beach ended in a rocky point, over which they had to scramble as best they could. The cliff to their left rose far above their heads, then came down to eye-level again, then rose once more and strode out into the water.

"Hey," said Sklar, "no more beetch! Can we wade?"

"I don't know," said Gil. "Hold my gun." And the Brazilian began feeling his way forward past the end of the beach, leaning against the cliff-face. A few steps, however, brought him up to his hips in the water, which rose and fell with the swells. A big wave splashed water all over him. He turned his face back into the beams of the flashlights.

"No good this way," he said. "We'll have to go back and find a route inland."

Graham could not help remembering that at any moment the water might start to rise, up—up—up—scores of meters above its usual level. The only safe places in such a case would be either on high ground inland or well out to sea where the tsunami's slopes were gentle.

Since the water usually receded in advance of a tsunami before it started to rise, they should have at least some minutes' warning, perhaps even a half-hour. If they started seaward the minute this recession began they might get a safe distance out before the wave arrived.

With this consideration in mind Graham said, "Why don't we take the raft? We could land right in front of the turtle-farm . . ."

"No," said Sklar. "No cover to approach. Might work but if anybody was watching the beetch we'd be sittink ducks."

They straggled back until they found another ravine cutting up into the cliff and picked their way up it. A few sparse plants grew among the rocks but otherwise the land seemed practically lifeless.

As they rounded a big boulder in the ravine something whitish snorted and scrambled out of range of their flashlights. Graham's heart leaped into his mouth until Gil, with a nervous little laugh, said, "Goat. They run wild here."

They scrambled up the ravine, sweating with exertion, until they could climb out on level land. After a short rest they set out again, checking their direction by the map and the stars. Graham walked behind Sklar, the wind pushing at him gently but continuously.

The half-moon was high in the sky and Graham was sure they had covered many kilometers when Sklar said, "Lights out—we're getting close."

Graham stumbled on the rough lava. The land at this point sloped all the way down to the beach on their right, instead of dropping off in the form of a cliff as it did elsewhere. As they came over a rise Graham could make out in the moonlight a group of structures ahead, running up from the shore like steps. Behind him he heard Gil fall down with a crash and a string of whispered oaths.

"Quiet!" murmured Sklar. "Spread out."

HE LED them down the slope towards the beach. As they got closer Graham could begin to make out the form of the turtle-farm—the buildings proper set well back from the water and between them and the beach dozens of tanks in which March raised his stock. He set a glance out to sea. Still no sign of the tsunami, the terrible mountain-ridge of water.

"Let's see that viewer," said Sklar. Graham passed it to him. While Sklar looked through the viewer, Gil did likewise through that attached to the machine-gun. After awhile Sklar passed the viewer back to Graham, who looked through it.

Gil offered his gun to Varnipaz, who whispered, "No thank you. My retinas are sensitive farther down in the infrared than yours, so I can see well enough."

"They seem to all have gone to bed," said Sklar, "but unless I miss my guess they'll have Miss Jeru locked up somewhere and a man watching outside her door. They don't know about Wen yet, so maybe they ain't expecting company. Varny, you come with me around the left

side of the tanks, while you other two go around the right side and try to find this guard. Go slow and kip your heads down."

He set off in a crouch and the others did likewise. Graham followed Gil, who every few steps raised his head above the level of the tanks to peer through his scope. From the tanks came faint bumpings as the turtles moved about.

They had reached the upper end of the tanks and had just turned left towards the other side of the layout when they heard a sharp "*Pst!*" They hurried ahead to where Sklar and Varnipaz crouched.

The former whispered, "We found him! In front of a little buildink at the south end."

"A concrete building with only small weendows, high up?" inquired Gil.

"That's it."

"That would be the sea-water distilling-plant."

Sklar said, "We can't blow up these buildinks until we know for sure which one she's in. But we can make a diversion. Varny, take your stuff around to the north end and get it ready to make a nice big explosion and fire. But don't set it off unless you hear shootink from us. Then come back and join us quick."

"Gil had better do it," said Varnipaz. "I don't know much about explosives."

Gil accordingly took the bag and faded off into the night. The others began stalking the guard outside the distilling-plant.

"He's around the next corner," breathed Sklar, passing his viewer back to Graham. The constable took out his paralyzer, raised it and peered around the corner of the building they were hiding behind.

The gadget went *brrrp!*

There was an exclamation from the unseen guard, cut off abruptly, then the clatter of a dropped gun.

They rushed around the building that sheltered them to find the man lying in the moonlight, his gun beside him. His eyes were open and he twitched in a way that showed he was still much alive. It

was Hank, the attendant at the Bay Head nudery.

Graham examined the building the man had been guarding. It was, as Gil had said, a small concrete structure with no outside openings save one small square one high up on each wall, which looked more like ventilator-openings with bars across them than windows and did not seem promising as means of egress.

The door was of wood, stout and strong. It was also locked. Sklar fumbled through the guard's pockets. "No key. That The'erhiya is smart. See if you can make her hear."

Graham put his mouth to the door and murmured, "*Betty! Betty!*"

After he had done this for half a minute he heard a faint, "Is that you, Gorodnon?"

"Yes. Hold tight. We're going to get you out."

"Out of the way, sonny boy," said Sklar. He attacked the lock with his lock-picker. After several tries he said disgustedly, "Don't fit. We'll have to blast the lock. Graham, take the viewer and find Gil. Tell him to light a lonk fuze and then come back to us."

Graham took the viewer and stole off towards the north end of the settlement. He found Gil laying out an elaborate series of noise and fire-making preparations against the northernmost building.

WHEN Graham had given his message the Brazilian said thoughtfully, "I theenk I will keep the gelatin. It will be useful on our way back. In that loose rock it will be as good as a fragmentation bomb."

He finished pegging out his fuzes, snapped his cigarette-lighter into flame and applied it to the ends. When the fuzes were all fizzing they headed back towards the other end of the hamlet.

Back at the distillery Graham asked, "The fuzes are lit; what are you going to do?"

Sklar replied, "When they go off I'm going to blast the lock with this." He

patted the machine-gun.

"Won't the shots go through the door and hit Betty?"

"I told her to get behind the cooling-coils, so she'll be pretty safe."

A sudden glare lit up the night sky and the shock-wave buffeted them. The main explosion was followed by a series of lesser reports and the pinkish flare of the incendiary mixture cast long lurid beams among the buildings.

Voices cried out in the night to be drowned by further explosions. Somewhere doors opened and running feet pounded.

"Get back," said Sklar. "Around the corner. Don't want to hit you with a ricochet."

The constable lay down on his back with his feet against the door of the distillery and began firing bursts at the wood around the lock. The hammering of the gun drowned out the other noises.

"Okus dokus," said Sklar and the three others ran around the corner of the building behind which they had taken refuge. Where the lock had been the door showed a gaping jagged black hole. With a little shaking the door came open.

"Betty!" called Graham.

"I come," she said and stepped out from behind the coils.

"Hurry," said Sklar.

As Jeru-Bhetiru stepped out of the building Graham saw that all she had on was a pair of men's pants, much too big for her, and a pair of rope-soled Spanish shoes.

"Hey!" cried a voice and a man started towards them between the rows of buildings.

SKLAR, still holding the machine-gun, whipped it to his shoulder and fired a burst. The man dropped. As he did so the gun gave a final click and stopped firing, its bolt open.

"Take it," said Sklar, and tossed it to Gil, who fumbled at his belt for another clip as he ran. They all trotted south back over the route by which they had come. The light of the fire allowed them

to run without their flashlights—for awhile at any rate. As if in answer to the fire the eastern horizon had now begun to show the first faint pallor of dawn.

Somewhere behind them a gun cracked—again—and again. A bullet hit a rock and screamed off.

Then they were out of the firelight and had to slow down to avoid stumbling. Gil said, "You go on—I cover you." He knelt behind a rock and sighted on the little black figures boiling out of the buildings, silhouetted against the glow of the fire.

Graham, his earlier fears forgotten, lusted to feel the kick of a gun. He rested his pistol on another rock. As the machine-gun clattered beside him the little figures ducked this way and that.

Graham squeezed his trigger. The pistol bucked in his hand but it was too far for accurate pistol-shooting and he could not tell whether he had hit anybody. They were all out of sight now but from among the hummocks came little twinkling flashes and the sounds of shots.

"Go on," said Gil. "We have to take turns at this."

Graham reluctantly went on, soon catching up with the others by virtue of his long legs. They picked their way, unable to use their lights for fear of drawing fire.

Presently Gil panted up after them, saying, "If you want a turn, Meester Gordon, here it is," and handed him the gun. "Don't stay too long—just enough to make them stop and take cover."

Graham found a place between a couple of boulders that gave him a loop-hole of convenient size. He waited while the footsteps of the others died away behind him. Too bad, he thought, that Sklar's paralyzer had such a short range.

After a long time a light appeared. Somebody was coming ahead slowly, sweeping the surface of the lava with a powerful flash.

Graham sighted on the light and fired a burst.

CHAPTER X

Hugger-Mugger

THE light went out. There were cries and the sound of men running and stumbling. Graham, calculating that they would shoot at the flash of his machine-gun, ducked back behind the larger of the two boulders. Sure enough, a rattle of shots came, mingled with the shrill *ptweeoo!* of the ricochets.

Then there was a sharper crack and a straight line of blue arc flashed into being. It ended among the rocks on the seaward side of Graham. That would be an Osirian shock-gun. The blue arc winked again, close enough to make Graham's muscles jerk with the electrical surge.

Graham edged around the other side of the large boulder and held his fire until he was sure he was lined up on the flashes of one of the guns of the pursuers, then fired a burst. Without waiting to see the results he slid back behind the boulder and began crawling away. It would take them some time to find he had gone.

He could move a little faster now for the light in the east was just beginning to reveal the shapes of the rocks over which he was walking, though not yet their color. He caught up with his party just before they reached the ravine up which they had come from the bench, which could now be seen as a darker gash in the dark tumbled surface.

"Here," said Gil, leaning on his elbows, half in and half out of the ravine. Graham handed him the gun.

There was a sudden rattle of rock and a groan from the darkness below.

"What is it?" said Graham, lowering himself into the gash.

"I have turned my ankle," said Varnipaz. Then, "It is all right. I can still walk on it."

Graham followed his companions down the ravine to the beach, using his hands like a monkey. Whatever the differences between the internal structure of human beings and Krishnans it was interesting to know that the latter had ankles subject to sprains like those of people.

Behind Graham the machine-gun clattered once. Then over the sound of the surf he heard the overturning of rocks and Gil stumbled and scrambled his way after them.

"Just a meenute!" called the Brazilian. "Before you run give me a couple of those gelatin sticks!"

Varnipaz paused and fished the explosives out of the bag he carried. Gil and Graham fitted a couple of lengths of slow fuze into them, lit them and tossed them as far as they could up the ravine.

Then they ran. Sklar and Jeru-Bhetiru were already far ahead of them. Graham passed Varnipaz, who limped painfully from his mishap. Graham knew they would have to hurry from now on. Hitherto conditions had been with them. The rough terrain favored the defense and the light had been just strong enough to see one's way without being bright enough for accurate shooting. Now, however, they would be out in the open with the light waxing every minute.

When they reached the place where the raft had been left Graham found that Sklar had already untied the painter and tossed his paralyzer into the vessel, saying, "Graham, you and Varny take the rear end, on account of that's heaviest. I'll take the front. Don't hit the propeller on the rocks."

They picked up the raft while Gil flattened himself against the base of the cliff and aimed his machine-gun back towards where the ravine debouched onto the beach.

As they neared the place where the sea should be Graham saw with a thrill of horror that the water was not where it had been. It had begun to recede and

even as they ran towards it it fled before them, faster and faster.

"The tsunami!" Graham yelled. "Catch that water and get out to sea, quick!" He turned to shout back, "Come on, Gil! The wave's coming!"

The gun clattered briefly and then Gil was running after them. A muffled boom came from the direction of the ravine, and out of the corner of his eye Graham saw a puff of dust and rock fly into the air. He could not tell if they had harmed the enemy by the explosion.

Gil panted after them. They stumbled over loose shingle, sank ankle-deep in mud, and meandered around outcrops of jagged lava. On the exposed sea-bottom seaweed lay sprawled and stranded sea-creatures flopped and scuttled.

The sharp crack and bright flash of the electrostatic projector made Graham cast a glance back. In the dim pre-dawn light he could make out forms moving on top of the cliff, others sliding down it to the beach. He thought he saw the tall reptilian figure of The'erhiya among them. Gunshots sounded and the nasty crack of h-v bullets whipped about their ears.

Gil turned, threw himself down behind a rock, aimed his machine-gun—and suddenly collapsed, dropping the gun.

"Hold it!" said Graham, letting go his corner of the raft. He ran back a few steps. One glance at Gil, the top of whose head had been taken off by a bullet, was enough to tell him the young man was dead.

Graham picked up the machine-gun and fired at the moving figures. The gun barked once and then stopped. Mud in the works, thought Graham, and worked the bolt a couple of times until it seemed to slide easily. Then it fired several bursts without difficulty. The pursuers sought cover or threw themselves flat.

BULLETS and high-voltage arcs whipped past Graham. He felt a sudden blow on his right arm that al-

most knocked him over, then a sharp pain. He looked down—a bullet had gone through the sleeve of his shirt and grazed his arm.

Luckily it was a flesh-wound only. A square hit might have taken his arm clear off as a result of the terrific m-v of modern firearms. He fired another burst—wondering why a target always looked so much smaller over a gunsight than when viewed in the normal fashion. The bolt clicked and the gun, now uncomfortably hot, was empty again.

Graham got up and ran to catch up with the others. At least it was light enough now so that he could really see where he was going. He zigzagged around the larger rocks and leaped over the smaller.

Varnipaz was still limping and Jeru-Bhetiru was manfully carrying the corner of the raft that Graham had dropped. "Gil?" asked Varnipaz.

"Dead," replied Graham. They had almost caught up with the receding water.

Sklar splashed into the surf and dropped the front end of the raft. The others pushed it off and piled aboard. Graham threw the machine-gun into the body of the little vessel, pushed the raft ahead of him until he was neck-deep and leaped in himself. Then he hunted around the outboard motor until he found the starting button.

The motor buzzed into life, sending the water foaming back from the spinning screw. The raft gathered speed, which, added to the velocity with which the receding water was bearing them away from Ascension, made them seem to be leaving at airplane speed.

Shots still came after them. Graham put one of his reserve clips into the machine-gun and fired back at the shore, though the pursuers were now so distant that from this unsteady platform he could do little more than spray the landscape in the hope of keeping down the return fire. Sklar and Varnipaz added to his barrage with a few shots from their pistols.

"Oh-oh!" said Sklar in the bow. "Here comes that wave of yours. Does anybody know how to pray?"

Graham put the gun on safety and looked around. He had long been in the habit of saying that, having studied tsunamis, he had no desire ever to see one in person. Now, it seemed, he was going to meet one whether he liked or not.

The earthquake-wave did not take the steep cliff-like form of a breaker. Instead the horizon—close at hand from their low position amongst the swells—seemed to lift itself slowly up against the paling eastern sky.

The raft slowed as it headed up a steeper and steeper slope. Behind them the exposed sea-bottom and the beach spread themselves out below their level. Ahead the slope of the tsunami extended away like that of a great rounded hill.

"Look!" cried Jeru-Bhetiru, pointing shoreward.

They were now on a level with the top of the small cliff and rising higher. The water had stopped receding and was now rushing back shoreward. Far down ahead of and below them the edge of the water foamed over the exposed bottom towards the beach.

They were still rising, so that now they were above the highest point on the northern peninsula and could see clear across to the ocean beyond. To their right Graham glimpsed the March turtle-farm before the waters overwhelmed it, liberating all the thousands of March's turtles. Now their great hill of water was carrying them swiftly back towards the peninsula.

Along the beach little figures, mere specks in the distance, could be seen frantically scrambling back up the cliff. The water roared up the beach, spurted high as it lapped against the rocks, finally submerged the cliff itself.

Then the curve of the watery hill hid the land ahead from those in the raft. The raft went faster and faster, drifting north and shoreward, and began to spin round and round like a top.

A great current was rushing around the northern tip of Ascension Island, rising higher and higher until most of the peninsula was one vast cascade over which sped a sheet of water. Graham gripped a couple of the rope hand-holds and hoped they would stay right-side up. The roar of the water drowned everything else.

The raft pitched and heaved madly. Gouts of foam burst all around it, lashing its passengers with salt spray. Ascension Island slid past them as deep water poured over the northern peninsula. Ahead of the raft the water sped over the land to meet the other water that had poured around the northern end of the island in a millrace of leaping waves, splashing tens of meters high.

Graham screamed, "Hold on!" at the top of his lungs but could not even hear himself.

Now almost the whole peninsula was submerged, all but a few of the highest rocks, past which they spun. Then they were sliding down the long slope towards the maelstrom on the lee side which, though it had abated somewhat, was still boiling.

THEN they were in it. Graham snatched a quick breath and held it. They seemed to run head-on into a wall of water and for a few seconds there was nothing but green-and-white smother all around them. Then, when it seemed as though his bursting lungs could stand it no longer, Graham realized that his head was clear.

The raft righted itself and they were drenched and coughing, gripping their loops of rope with the grip of desperation. The raft still tossed wildly and water sloshed back and forth around their legs but at least they could breathe. The machine-gun and the other loose gear had disappeared and the engine had stopped.

When he had coughed the water out of his lungs and squeezed the water out of his eyes Graham looked towards the

island. The air was filled with the screams of tens of thousands of terns, flooded off their nests. In the dawn light he could now make out the rugged reddish-brown form of Ascension and see many of its forty volcanic cones, culminating in Green Mountain with its cloud-cap.

As they watched the land of the peninsula began to appear above the water—first a rock here and there, then continuous stretches, finally the cliffs around the edges.

Meanwhile the backwash from the first wave sucked them northward around the tip of the peninsula. As the minutes passed the whole of the peninsula emerged, the water running off its top in sheets and cascades. The surrounding sea slowly sank to a level lower, then to normal, as it had been just before the first wave. However another rise sent them spinning back westward around the tip of the peninsula again. But this and subsequent waves came nowhere near submerging the peninsula. They merely rose and fell like speeded-up spring tides.

The four people in the raft, two human and two Krishnan, stared at the rusty barren land. Graham picked up the bucket that was attached by a line to the raft and methodically began bailing.

"What was that?" said Varnipaz, coughing.

"What?" asked Sklar.

"It sounded like a voice crying for help. In—that direction, I think." Varnipaz pointed.

"I don't think anybody could have come through that alive," said Sklar. "Probably one of these sea-gulls."

GRAHAM was fussing with the engine, which stubbornly refused to start. At last he got out the oars.

"If you'll move a bit," he said, "I'll try to row. Mr. Sklar, you take the paddle in the stern."

"You know about boats and thinks?" said Sklar with raised eyebrows.

"I've—uh—had a little experience."

"Okus dokus, then you be captain."

The sun was now half above the horizon. Graham looked at Jeru-Bhetiru, who in her unembarrassed seminudity looked like the most desirable thing on earth. He asked, "Betty, why are you wearing that rig?"

She explained. "In Rio I tried to get away when they were putting me into their airplane to fly out here. They caught me and my dress got so torn they gave me these instead. What is wrong with your arm? Were you wounded?"

"Just a graze," he said but submitted gladly to letting her bind up his wound.

The cry came again so that all could hear it. Sklar steered the raft in that direction. Presently, as the swells lifted them, they could see a couple of black dots bobbing about between them and the shore. Graham pulled hard and soon they drew alongside the swimmers. One was the fat bald Warschauer, the other a lemur-like extra-terrestrial—Adzik of Thoth.

"Well," said Gorden Graham, "fancy meeting you here! Don't b-be afraid—you're among fiends."

He reached for his pistol but Sklar said, "Hey! Don't shoot with your gun all wet. You'll blow it up."

Graham therefore hunted among the compartments of the raft until he found a fish-spear in three sections. As the raft came closer to Warschauer, who struck out strongly and caught one of the ropes, Graham assembled the spear.

He said to Warschauer, "All right, now t-tell us what this whole plot was about."

"I'm not talking until I see my lawyer," said Warschauer.

"Yeah?" said Graham, thrusting the spear into the man's face. "Want me to stick this into your guts and turn it around a few times?"

"You wouldn't do that!"

"Try me and see. The s-same for you," he told Adzik, who had paddled up alongside Warschauer and had hold of another rope.

WARSCHAUER coughed up some sea-water and said, "Okay, you win. Especially since it looks as though Adzik's gang has double-crossed us. Adzik was the head of the syndicate on Earth. The'erhiya was just the hypnotist who kept us in line. He had control of me too so I couldn't tell you this except I've been half drowned and that seems to have broken the hold."

"What was the objective?" asked Graham.

"To colonize Gamanovia with Thothians, stupid."

"How?"

"Adzik's a member of a private syndicate, most of them government people as well. That's how they do things on Thoth. They wanted Gamanovia raised ahead of time to break the contract so March would own the whole continent. Or rather Joe Aurelio, who brought the Rock from March."

"What then?"

"Joe signed an agreement to sell the continent to the syndicate, who would in turn sell it, at a colossal profit, to the Thothian planetary government. Before Earth knew what was happening the continent would be full of surplus Thothians dumped there from space-ships."

"They couldn't get away with that!"

"Think so? Remember the case of Thor versus Earth? When the Terrestrials grabbed a continent on a similar deal and then argued that since ancient wrongs could never be righted they should be left in possession?"

"It's not the same."

"Legally it is. At that time the court set up the precedent that legal immigrants to a planet might not be expelled except for individual crimes."

"But the W. F. wouldn't allow this immigration in the first place!"

"How could they stop it? Under their constitution the right to limit immigration is reserved to the nations—and the World Court says that means immigration from other planets too."

"But this immigration would be

based on fraud! Kidnapping people, hypnotizing the project scientists—"

"Sure, but you'd have had a hell of a time proving that if the plans had gone through as scheduled."

"So the W. F. spends billions to make a home for monkey-rats! Is that so, Adzik?" said Graham, pointing the spear at the Thothian.

"Yes," squeaked Adzik, "though I must protest your use of the insulting term monkey-rat. May we come aboard now? I am tired of swimming."

"Okay but one false move and back you go. Where are the rest?"

Warschauer snorted. "What d'you think? Drowned! Lundquist stopped a bullet before the tidal wave came. The'erhiya couldn't swim and the only reason we're alive is I'm too fat to sink and Adzik swims like a seal. What happened—earthquake?"

"You'll find out in the clink," said Sklar. "Say, ain't we driftink?"

The trade-wind had indeed blown them several kilometers to the northwest. Graham made one more fruitless effort to start the motor, then got out the sail and the waterproof instruction-book for setting it.

Half an hour later they had the sail rigged—a simple triangular lateen that swung from the top of the stubby mast. Graham, who knew at least the theory of sailing if not the practise, thought he could tack back to Ascension. However, he soon found that despite its stiff-rubber keel the shallow craft drifted to leeward faster than he could beat to windward. Ascension continued to recede.

"We'll have to row," he said. "Mr. Sklar, keep the spear on these two. Warschauer, you take one oar and I'll take the other. Betty, you take the paddle. Mr. Sklar, poke him every time he catches a crab."

"How should I catch a crab out here?" asked Warschauer innocently.

Sklar, who had given up trying to light a soaked cigarette, asked, "How lunk are we going to last in this boat?"

"We've g-got food and water for some days in the compartments. And if we run out there's always our friends." Graham nodded towards Warschauer and Adzik.

"I have been looking into the Earthly law on cannibalism," said Varnipaz. "To kill a man for the main purpose of eating him is illegal but if he dies for any other reason it is all right. So if Mr. Warschauer forces us to kill him by acting obstreperous . . ."

Warschauer's expression showed that he considered this a joke in very poor taste.

With the oars they made time back towards the island. They were still a kilometer from shore when a noise overhead caused them to look up—a *swoosh* like that of a gasoline blow-torch greatly amplified. Graham recognized the blast of a space-ship's rocket motor.

"There she is!" said Sklar, pointing.

CHAPTER XI

A Space-Ship Vanishes

DOWN came the ship, growing from a speck to a spot to a rocket standing on its tail. It dropped towards the northern peninsula of Ascension. To Graham it somehow looked neither like a standard *Viagens Interplanetarias* vessel nor an Osirian ship.

"They have come!" squeaked Adzik. "We are saved! Warschauer, we can still put it over! The contract is in March's safe, which is still in his house, even if wet!"

"*Hey!*" said Sklar, gripping his spear.

The space-ship hovered over the peninsula, drifting this way and that as the pilot sought a patch of level ground. Then down it came on its tail in a burst of steam and dust from the earth beneath. The jet sputtered and died.

The Thothian shrieked, "If we can get

my people to destroy these there will be no more evidence! They are the only ones who know the whole story! Follow me!"

As Adzik dived overboard, Sklar sent a futile jab after it. The raft rocked as Warschauer too went over the side.

"Throw the spear!" said Varnipaz.

As Sklar hesitated with the unfamiliar weapon the fugitives drew out of range, Warschauer holding the tail of the powerfully-swimming Thothian.

"Grab that oar!" said Graham to Varnipaz.

They started rowing vigorously but it soon transpired that with the wind against them they were outclassed.

Jeru-Bhetiru said, "Little people like Adzik are getting out of the space-ship."

"They're Tothians, all right," said Sklar. "Look up!"

Overhead appeared six more dots, circling slowly and balancing on their jets.

"The rest of the Thothian colonists," said Sklar.

Graham said between strokes, "They won't—land until the—first ones mark—out level spaces—for them. And—that'll take some time—on Ascension."

Jeru-Bhetiru said, "Adzik and Warschauer have reached the shore. They are standing up. A big wave just knocked Warschauer down but he is getting up. The Thothians from the ship are running down to shore. They are talking . . ."

Sklar said, "You guys better head out to sea again. They're settink up some kind of gun."

The raft spun and headed back northwest, faster because the sail now helped. Again Ascension shrank until the Thothians became mere moving specks. Now that he was facing shoreward Graham could see that they were indeed setting up some kind of weapon, though it was too far for details. He hoped that, being crowded with colonists, the ship could not have carried anything heavy.

Something went *wheep*, and there was a loud crack. A column of water rose high in the air near the raft.

Wheep-crash! Another, nearer.

"They've got us—ranged now," panted Graham. "The next one'll get us . . ."

Wheep-crash! But this was farther away instead of nearer.

"My Lord!" said Sklar. "*Look!*"

A long gray shape had emerged from the waters of the South Atlantic, water running off its decks in sheets, and was now accelerating to full surface speed. As its atomic engines forced it up to sixty knots or more towards Ascension, spray leaped in huge splashes and its pointed nose butted through the waves. The column of water from the last explosion towered in this ship's wake.

A cupola on the forward deck opened and a girder structure appeared. With a *whoosht* a rocket leaped towards Ascension. The missile accelerated to a streak, its path curving as its guiding mechanism led it towards the space-ship.

"Cover your eyes!" cried Graham.

A blinding flash, visible even through closed lids, came from the island, followed by a tremendous roar and a puff of air-blast that carried away the sail and almost upset the raft. When they opened their eyes a huge cloud of smoke and dust was boiling up from the peninsula. The space-ship had vanished.

They sat half-stunned while the six space-ships overhead filed off westward out of sight. The warship circled towards them.

Jeru-Bhetiru said, "Will that mean war between your planets?"

Sklar shook his head. "You can't have real interplanetary war for logistic reasons, yonk lady. Besides, the Thothian government will say these were private pibble and they are not responsible. Maybe there will soon be a new government on Thoth."

The warship drew alongside to windward, the checkered flag of the World Federation flying from its staff. The name *Nigeria* became visible on the con-

ning-tower and a crew with shiny-black faces appeared on deck. A squirt of oil flattened the waves and the sailors hoisted them aboard.

An African officer with a major's stripes said, I'm skipper and my name's Nwafor. Are you Reinhold Sklar?"

Sklar introduced himself and his companions. Major Nwafor said, "We were out on a routine cruise from Free-town when we got a wireless from General Vasconcellos of the Brazilian Federal Police. He seemed to think there might be trouble at Ascension and asked us to stop by. We ordered that fellow to stop shooting and when he fired at us we had to defend ourselves."

Sklar looked up. "Where are the Thothian ships goink?"

"I ordered them to Bahia for arrest and internment. Now go below, please. When you get yourselves dried off I would like to hear your stories."

The whine of turbojets made them look around. Against the western sky a seaplane with the blue-green-and-yellow markings of the United States of Brazil was bearing down on them.

"Late as usual," grumbled Sklar and led the others below.

ON THE airliner for New York, Jeru-Bhetiru sat facing Graham and Varnipaz in an Earthly dress bought in Rio—an enchanting sight even if the costume made less of her mammalian attractions than her native garb. The others' hair was beginning to grow out again after they had discarded their helmets and wigs for good.

She said, "I am so sorry about that poor Mr. Gil. It was not worth while rescuing me if he had to get killed in the doing."

Varnipaz nodded somberly. "He said he wanted to see some action before he died and he did." The Krishnan turned to Gordon Graham. "I owe you more than I can pay, Gordon. As in my own world I am a person of some importance you shall have anything you wish if I

can manage it. Name your reward."

Graham looked up from the engineering report he was writing for the Brazilian Federal Police and exchanged glances with Jeru-Bhetiru. The Krishnan had turned out to be quite as fine a fellow as he had seemed and you couldn't very well respond to his offer by telling him you wanted his girl.

"Go ahead," said Varnipaz. "Anything you desire."

"Well—uh—" said Graham.

"Be frank."

Graham took a deep breath and said: "If you r-really w-w-want to know, I'm in love with your fiancée."

Varnipaz raised his antennae slightly. "Interesting. That however is something for her to decide. What about it, Jeru-Bhetiru?"

"I love Gorodon too," she said. "Madly. But of course I shall still marry you as planned."

"What?" said Graham. "How d'you figure that?"

She explained gently. "In my country this state you call being in love has nothing to do with marriage. We think that people who mate on a basis of interest and advantage are happier in the long run than those who do so on a basis of a temporary sexual attraction. While the latter does sometimes happen we consider the victims to be pitied. This romantic idea of the Earthly Western culture makes no sense to us.

"The engagement of Varnipaz and myself is a stroke of statesmanship, intended to set up a tie between Kätai-Jhogorai, the most cultured state on Krishna, and Sotaspé, the most scientific. We like each other and shall get

along well. We certainly would not spoil such an excellent plan because of a temporary infatuation, especially with an Earthman. You and I, Gorodon, could not even have young."

"W-we could adopt—" began Graham but she stopped him.

"Adopt what, an Osirian with scales or a Vishnuvan with six legs? No, Gorodon darling, you know as well as I that it would not be the same."

And then they were at the New York Airport. Varnipaz shook hands with Graham and Jeru-Bhetiru kissed him soundly and off they went, the Krishnan girl on the arm of her betrothed.

GRAHAM turned to Sklar. "How about a drink before we go into town?"

"Sure think," said the constable and they walked towards the bar. "Don't look so sad, pal. After all you're a hero."

"I do feel sort of let down," said Graham. "Of course it's nice to have the President of Brazil shake your hand and Souza offer you a permanent job on the Project and that sort of thing. But I was hoping . . ."

"That the little squid would—uh—make some arrangement, huh? You'll be glad some day. When you been married as lunk as I have you take a relaxed view of such thinks. After all you saved the continent for the W. F., didn't you? What do you want, an egg in your beer?"

"I'm afraid I do."

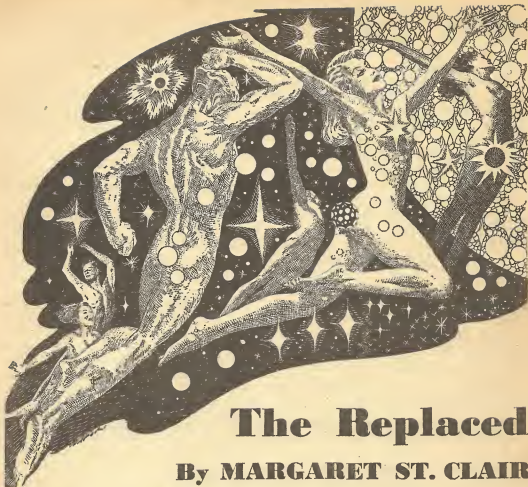
"Okus dokus." Reinhold Sklar turned to the bartender. "A Martian special for me and for my friend here one stein of lager. Put an egg in it."

FEATURED NEXT ISSUE

SON OF THE TREE

A Brilliant Short Novel of a Man's Strange Quest in Distant Worlds Where the Earth is a Forgotten Planet

By JACK VANCE



The Replaced

By MARGARET ST. CLAIR

Old age can be irksome even on an artificial planetoid devoted to gastronomic comforts—but there's an interstellar way out!

AFTER breakfast Peter and Martha Mitchin used to sit on the blue benches in the sunlight near the bandstand, waiting for the concert to begin. This morning Peter Mitchin was irritable.

"Who ever heard of robots like the ones here?" he demanded. "Those disks on their arms—what are they there for? The robots never seem to use them for anything. And the disks look ugly, like the suckers on an octopus."

"I like the kind of robots I'm used to.

"If I'd known they had those things here I'd never have come. It's a crazy idea anyhow, using old out-of-date robots from a planet where there haven't been any real people for we don't know how long."

"The robots ought to've been left there, on Venus. Nobody wants to spend a vacation with robots that give him the creeps." He moved his long legs impatiently, then stretched them out in the warmth of the artificial sun.

"I like them," Martha said, defending.

"They're so pretty and graceful, not like Earth robots that only go clump clump clump. I like to have them wait on me. It's a sort of novelty.

"Listen, Peter—" she put her thin old hand on top of his and gave it a squeeze—"don't you go getting cranky. We came here to enjoy ourselves and I *am* enjoying myself. Don't you spoil it. Goodness, it's costing enough."

Peter's face relaxed. One of the robots they had been discussing came gliding up to them, a tray of cups balanced on each hand. It bowed, presented the tray to Peter and his wife. They took the cups of broth nearest to them. "It's good," Martha said, sipping.

"I can't say I care for the smell of it this morning."

"Oh, go on—try it. There's a kind of a tang to it you'll like after the first taste."

Peter drank. "Wonder what the first men to land on Venus thought when they saw all the empty cities," he said reflectively. "All those big empty cities and nobody in them except robots. Run down, no power, not moving any more than if they were dead. Do you suppose they thought the robots were people, Mother?" He put his cup down, empty.

"I guess so," Martha answered, without interest. She was leaning over to show Mrs. Fairlie, the lady who had the cottage next to theirs, the new pattern she had set up on her autoloom. "They must have."

"Or maybe they thought the people were *inside* of the robots," Peter said, chuckling. "Or . . ." Absently he picked up the slice of pale substance from the bottom of his cup and nibbled at it.

MRS. FAIRLIE, who was leaning forward in her turn to show Martha her weaving, raised her eyebrows in surprise. "Oh, did you have apple in your broth?" she asked in her faded voice. "Mine was lemon. Very nice."

"Not apple," Peter answered, spitting. "Too strong. More like cinnamon."

"I guess some of the broths were different," Mrs. Fairlie replied. "Listen." She raised her hand. "Isn't the band beginning to tune up? We'd better hurry if we don't want to miss the concert."

They got to their feet, Peter leaning on his cane, Martha leaning on his arm. "The concerts here are very good," Mrs. Fairlie said.

Time passed. The Mitchins sat in the sun on the blue benches, listened to the marimba band concerts, walked creakily down to the green to watch the men under seventy playing bocca ball. On the tenth day the director of diversion—such a nice friendly young man—came up to them as they were settling themselves in the bandstand before the concert.

"Yes, we're enjoying ourselves," Martha answered his polite question. She was clicking away steadily on her loom, making a design of big purple flowers. "This is a nice place, Mr. Kensel. Interesting programs, nice people, light wholesome food. The weather is always delightful."

"Well, it ought to be—on an artificial planetoid," Mr. Kensel declared, laughing. Then he said, "Are you feeling well, the both of you? If you're not, why don't you try our medical installations? They've got the very latest geriatric circuits. It wouldn't cost you anything, of course. Anything like that is included in the rates."

Peter opened his mouth to answer. He felt Martha prod him sharply in the ribs. She said, "Thank you, Mr. Kensel, but it's not necessary. We're both feeling fine. Aren't we, Peter? We never felt better in our lives."

"Well, that's fine, Mrs. Mitchin," the director answered, looking at her. "I'm glad to hear that. Remember, if you should change your mind it's included in the rates. Well . . ." He got up and walked away from them. Once he looked back.

"What did you tell him that for, Mother?" Peter Mitchin demanded

when the first band number was over. "Why didn't you let me speak?"

The lever of the autoloom clicked fiercely. "Aren't you feeling well, Peter?" she asked sharply. "Aren't you? Answer me."

"Yes, I feel well enough," he replied slowly. He held out his hands in the sun and looked at them. Weren't they thinner, lighter, whiter than they had been? "But I feel . . . I feel . . . I don't feel like myself."

The loom stopped clicking. "How do you feel then?" Martha asked, laughing. "Tell me, dear."

"Like—I don't know—like I'd had a couple of drinks, a little dizzy. Not like myself."

"But outside of not feeling like yourself," Martha said, twinkling, "you do feel well? As well as you ever felt?"

"Yes, I suppose so. If you put it like that."

They had a nice lunch, a light wholesome supper. In the evening there was an interesting program, *Beauties of Olden Venus*, in the lecture hall. They went to bed. Peter woke about two o'clock in the morning. He was terribly afraid.

"Martha," he said, clutching at her, waking her. "Martha!"

"What is it, darling?" Her voice was thick with sleep.

"Martha—Mother—we've got to get out of here!"

"Why, Peter?" In the darkness, was she laughing at him?

"Because we're changing—we're being changed! Something terrible is happening. Can't you feel it, Mother? Oh, quick! We've got to get out of here!"

She drew him onto her shoulder. How many nights had he lain on that shoulder? It was thinner than it had been once, no longer so smooth-skinned—but it was Martha's and dear.

"Hush," she said softly to him. "Darling, hush. What if we are changing? Life is change, never-ending change. We can't stop it or stand still in the cur-

rent. It's all right. Hush. Hush."

Reassured, he slid back into sleep.

THEY took to going to their cottage in the mornings, after they had had their broth, to lie down. The music of the band seemed jangling and harsh, hurt their ears. They lay side by side on the bed, the blinds drawn so that the room floated in a dim greenish hush, only their noses and their toes sticking up.

Peter would hold Martha's hand as he drifted drowsily among dreams like the stems of seaweed, old dreams, dreams that were not quite his. He felt something swelling and straining inside of him. He waited for it to grow without impatience or anxiety. But he was always dizzy and tired when they got up to go to lunch.

"How long will it take, Martha?" he asked suddenly one day, putting down the military brushes with which he had been parting his thin hair.

"Will what take?" she replied absently. She was fastening her pearls and putting on her bar pin. "We'd better hurry. That's the second luncheon gong."

"The—you know."

"Oh—not so much longer, I guess. I'll ask some of the others. But I think we're getting on."

"Others? What others?" Peter said stupidly. "I thought we were the only ones."

"Oh, no. Mrs. Partridge, Mrs. Ellis, Mr. and Mrs. James. Oh, and Mr. Daniels. I almost forgot him."

"Not Mrs. Fairlie?"

"No, it won't do for everybody. That's why she gets lemon in her broth, you see."

"While we get—"

"Never mind!" Martha said quickly. She kissed him on the cheek. "Come along, dear."

Outside the cottage she stopped abruptly. She frowned, stooped over, looked at the ground. "Somebody's been here," she said, straightening.

"Look at those tracks! There, in the soft dirt." Her cheeks were flushed.

Peter looked. There were footprints near the cottage's window. "You mean somebody was watching us? It wasn't a robot."

"No, of course not. A robot wouldn't. It must have been that Mr. Kensel. He's curious. Oh, dear. There'll be trouble now, I suppose."

"Trouble?" Peter stared. His heart thumped. "Martha—maybe we'd better—give it up."

"Oh, no." She wasn't really listening to him. "It's gone too far now. But . . ."

The day went by. Martha talked to Mrs. Partridge, Mrs. Ellis, Mr. and Mrs. James. Peter listened, understanding a scrap here, a scrap there. He was an outsider, he thought with a touch of resentment, even though he was changing, had changed. They all knew something he didn't. It wasn't fair.

At eight that evening Mr. Kensel called them into his office. They were all there, even Mr. Daniels. A smile rippled around the room as Martha and Peter came in.

Mr. Kensel found it hard to start. He fidgeted with the things on his desk top. He coughed and cleared his throat. His pleasant youthful face was flushed. He would look at them and then avoid their eyes. At last he rose from his desk and, hands clasped behind his back, began to pace around the room.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began formally, "ladies and gentlemen, drug addiction is a terrible thing."

Drug addiction—Peter Mitchin felt as if a capsule of enlightenment had burst within his brain. Drug addiction! That explained so many things—but not everything. Why had he not thought of it?

Martha had been working quietly on her autoloom. Now she put it aside. "Yes, of course, Mr. Kensel," she said agreeably. "Nobody would deny that. But why bring us here to tell us so?"

Mr. Kensel's already pink face turned

dull red. "Because—because—oh, *damn* it! Because you're all drug addicts."

His outburst seemed to have done him good. More calmly he continued, "What I want to know is, why? The youngest of you is nearly eighty. You haven't much more than ten or fifteen years left of life. Why have you contracted a habit like this?"

"I know that life can be hard. Sometimes life for us terrestrials can be terribly hard. But you people have come through the painful years into the tranquil time, the sunset. There isn't the excuse—there isn't any excuse—for you. I'd like to know why."

ACTUALLY they hadn't had much choice, Peter thought, with a touch of sardonic humor. He opened his lips to tell Mr. Kensel so. But Mr. Daniels had begun to speak.

"Did it ever occur to you, Mr. Kensel," he wheezed, laboriously, leaning over his cane, "that old age can be a preparation—a sort of chrysalis?"

"A chrysalis?" Kensel answered. "I don't know what you mean."

"A preparation for a different sort of life," Mr. Daniels said impatiently. "A transition to a higher state of things."

"A different sort of life?" Kensel said. He threw back his head and laughed incredulously. "A higher state of things? And what, pray, is this higher state of life you people are reaching at eighty? Into what are you developing?"

Mrs. Ellis got to her feet. She was a rather heavy woman, who seldom spoke. "You asked that to make fun of us," she said softly. "But I'll tell you the answer anyhow. We're turning into Venusians."

She looked at the others. All except Peter nodded. "Yes, into Venusians. That's the next stage."

Mr. Kensel had turned rather white. "What do you mean?" he said. "There aren't any Venusians. There's nobody on Venus—only the robots. Nobody has ever seen a Venusian."

"Yes, when they grew up, when they became real Venusians, they went away!" Martha said. The autoloom had slipped from her lap to the floor. "Their servants, the robots, helped them. They were built for that. And now we've replaced them, the old ones. We too—Venusians."

Mr. Kensel had moved toward the door. There was a moment before he spoke. "I'm sorry," he panted. "I'm sorry. I thought perhaps I could persuade you to give it up. I hoped there wouldn't have to be a scandal. I didn't want your families and friends to know. But I've got to report it now."

"Then you *haven't* reported it!"

THEY crowded around him. Mr. Daniels hit him with his cane, Mrs. James struck at him with an autoloom. Mr. Kensel's face held first amazement, then chivalry and then fear. There were many blows. Peter realized afterward that he had struck some of them.

And then there was silence. Peter, looking down at Kensel's slack body, felt a wave of nauseated amazement at what he had learned about himself. He wanted to hold onto something. And there was blood on Martha's shoe.

One of the robots came in. It moved easily, gracefully. Its left arm was held out in front of it. In the center of each of the disks on its arm was a low squat cup. Seven cups, one for each of them.

"So that's what the disks were for," Peter said to his wife.

She nodded. "The Venusians weren't quite like us. Perhaps it took them longer, perhaps it wasn't even the same drink. But their servants used to bring it to them, to all the Venusians, over the years. And when earth people became their masters we replaced the Venusians with them. The robots helped us in the same way." She stretched across to the robot and took one of the cups.

Peter laid his hand on her arm. "Don't—oh, don't!" he said. "How do you know what will happen? Where are the

Venusians? And there's blood on your shoe. I'm afraid."

"I'm sorry about Mr. Kensel," she said, blinking. "We didn't want it to happen. But he shouldn't have got in our way. He had small thoughts."

"About the Venusians—Peter, we can't stop. Whatever happened to them has to happen to us. Don't be afraid. I want to drink from the cup."

"Don't!" he implored once more. But she emptied it.

"Hurry, Peter, drink," she said softly. "This is the time. You mustn't wait."

He wanted to wring his hands. It seemed to him she had grown lighter and thinner while he looked at her. "What shall I do?" he asked almost humbly. "I'm frightened. I've never understood it like the rest of you."

All the other cups had been emptied. The room seemed larger than it had been. Martha laid her hand on his wrist. He could barely feel her touch. "Drink and you'll understand. Drink. I can't tell you. But we've been together so many years now, Peter. Drink. We can't be separated now."

He emptied the cup. It fell from his fingers. "So *that's* it," he said.

"Yes, yes!" she answered joyously. "Where shall we go first?"

"To Saturn! An then Vega—Arcturus—the nine Pole Stars!"

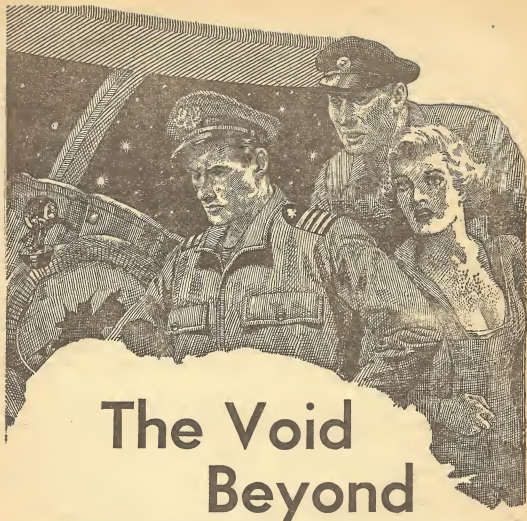
They went through the window. In a moment the planetoid would grow round beneath them. The robots were standing on the lawn outside to watch them go.

They raised their disked forearms in salutation. Their task was over until they should find new masters. "Good-bye," Peter and the others called down to them. "Good-bye, and thank you for Saturn. Good-bye!"

For a moment Peter lingered. Now that he understood he was full of gratitude toward the robots. He would have liked to tell them so. But the others were already darting like sparks toward the zenith. And at the speed of light he followed them.



The feelings under tight control deep within
Eric Gaunt threatened to erupt



The Void Beyond

A Novelet by ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

CHAPTER I

For Men Only

THERE was a meteor swarm out beyond Pluto. Seen through the biggest telescope on Earth, it was only a cloud of dust, no bigger than a man's hand. But astronomers, who had learned

something of the possible effect of a cloud of dust in the terrible devastation on Mars in the 23rd century and in the belated recognition of other cosmic encounters in the distant past, were ob-

Space-travel was strictly a stag affair—until Dr. Frances Marion took drastic steps to cure the malady that confined women to Mother Earth!

viously and deeply worried.

Earth Government was worried too. Close investigation was needed to determine the exact direction in which this cloud was moving and its nature. Yes, a ship would be sent. The ship selected for this trip was a commercial job just finishing overhaul in Chicago Spaceport, Captain Eric Gaunt, master, called "Eric the Gaunt" by spacemen everywhere in the solar system, for reasons obvious to anyone who saw him.

The *Martian Bounce* was loading boxes into the forward hold. The big mate, Joseph Tillingham, who was called "Tilly" by everybody from the master down to the newest cabin boy, was waiting, passenger list in hand, at the midship ramp for the arrival of the passengers.

It wasn't much of a list—there were only four names on it—but it was his duty to check them aboard. He saw the first one arrive, looked, then looked again, then hastily scrutinized the list he held in his hand, his scarred face a picture of unhappiness.

Captain Eric Gaunt was coming up from his final inspection of the engine room, wondering what deficiency of character had made him accept command of this hop, when he saw that the big mate was in trouble.

It wasn't really trouble—spacemen have their own private definition for this word, differing remarkably from the definition found acceptable by the lower orders of human life, who, keeping their feet on the ground, never have a chance to learn the real meaning of trouble. It was just an argument.

An ordinary argument would not have attracted Eric's attention as spacemen are a breed who get into arguments easily. Then too he had seen this big mate have an argument with five Martians once, the Martians arguing with knives, the mate with his battered fists—and on another occasion, with three Venusians. So he would not have noticed an ordinary argument in which Tilly was involved, not until the number on

the other side got up to at least six. But he noticed this one.

Tilly was arguing with a woman, who, Eric gathered, was trying to come aboard. At the sight Eric started to back hastily out of sight. He didn't make it. Tilly saw him.

"Hey, Eric!" the familiar bull bellow came roaring through the ship. The mate came right behind it, breathing fire and thunder, exasperation and indignation. "Eric, this woman, she claims she is scheduled to go with us on this hop." Pain sounded in every throb of Tilly's voice.

"You handle—" So far Eric got when the mate's voice roared on again, expressing the bill of particulars.

"And she's got a ticket and a passport."

"Those fools in the front office will do anything for a dollar," Eric said bitterly. He expressed the view held by all spacemen, that the front office existed only for the purpose of making more difficult the lives of honest spacemen. "Did you tell her where we are going!"

"She already knew. And they knew. Her ticket says 'beyond Pluto and back.'"

"And she still wants to go along?" Eric asked incredulously. He saw that the woman was approaching but he tried hard not to notice her. In the manner of a man passing the buck and glad to do it, the mate shoved certain papers into his captain's hand and fled. Eric Gaunt was left to face the object which had scared hell out of a mate who didn't mind arguing with five armed Martians but did mind arguing with one woman.

SHE was, Eric saw, about twenty-five. Neatly dressed, her face clean without rouge or lipstick, she had the well-scrubbed appearance that was to his liking. Her eyes were violet and under other circumstances . . . He shook his head at this thought of other circumstances. Dreaming was for sane people who kept their feet on the ground. He

belonged to space. "You're the captain of this ship?" she said as if something about this fact worried her.

"What's wrong with that?"

The violet eyes regarded him with perplexed awe.

"You're so young."

Under his breath Eric Gaunt swore heartily. Then he said, "All spacemen are young. They take you at sixteen and you spend two years in school. At

"I know about that," this girl said. Her violet eyes showed sympathy. "It's just that I have always thought of spacemen, especially captains in command of a ship, as old men with gray beards—the father complex lying on the unconscious level—and it's a shock to me to meet one and see that he is a young man."

"Well—" He didn't know what to make of this, he didn't know whether

An Interplanetary Problem



WHEN man first hoisted himself astride a horse, whatever clan solons or shamans were handy probably predicted his speedy demise from lack of breathable air at such an altitude. Certainly, when the first locomotives came into being some 150 years ago, learned scientists stated positively that he would not survive speeds of greater than thirty miles per hour. More recently we have seen blasted similar sage deductions anent his surpassing the speed of sound.

The oddest part of the predictions is that they are based upon factors which, in practise, are of negligible importance. The first horseman undoubtedly had far more trouble with saddle burns and sore kidneys than he ever had with rarefied air. Locomotive engineers were slain in greater numbers by bursting boilers and derailments than they were by inadaptability to speeds of more than half a mile per minute. And flyers are more concerned with staying up than slowing down.

So, today, our authorities are concerned, when space-flight is under consideration, with the effect of compression caused by acceleration upon the human body. They have charts, graphs and Ph.D. theses to prove man's inability to get off the Earth. We have a hunch they are wrong, as does Mr. Williams, or he would not have written this story of space-flight. We also have a hunch that Mr. Williams here considers a problem that may well prove a very real one when at last human beings are traveling the interplanetary lanes.

—THE EDITOR.

eighteen you go to space as a cabin boy. Twelve years later you retire. I started as a cabin boy. I'm a captain now. I've got two more years to go."

He put the words bluntly and neither by manner nor tone did he reveal his hidden feelings. Two more years and he would retire on a pension, could settle down and raise a family, could take life easy—and watch younger men blast off into the skies forevermore denied to him. The hard inflexible reasons back of retirement at thirty he did not mention.

or not he liked it. "What can I do for you, Miss —"

"Frances Marion. The mate"—her eyes sought the direction in which the perplexed first officer had fled—"seemed to feel something was wrong with my papers. You have them there."

"So I do." He realized now that Tillie had given him the papers in question. He began to examine them, to give himself time to think if for no other reason. The passport was in order. There was a letter of credit for \$20,000, good any-

where in the Solar System. There was a letter stating that Miss Frances Marion was an employee of the Trans-World Telecast System, *on special assignment to take motion pictures of the solar system and the universe as seen from beyond Pluto, also the dust cloud there, for telebroadcasting.* It requested all interested parties to give her every possible assistance.

Reading this letter you got the impression that Trans-World Telecast would be your slave forever if you helped this employee and that if you didn't help her you would never get your picture on a telescreen. In the letter you could almost hear the thunder of saluting cannons announcing the arrival of royalty.

All of which impressed Eric the Gaunt not at all. As a space captain, he was so much top royalty himself that he didn't even need to mention the subject.

The ticket was next. It was plainly made out to Franc-i-s Marion, which maybe gave the front office an out and maybe did not.

"Your name is misspelled on the ticket."

"Is that important?"

"The spelling can be corrected but unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately, depending on the viewpoint"—he let his eyes rove up and down her trim figure as he spoke—"what it represents cannot be corrected. Did the front office know you were a woman—that is, did you apply for this ticket in person?"

"As a matter of fact I did not. Does the fact that I am a woman make a difference?"

"It does. We don't sell tickets to women. And on this hop, when we're going out beyond Pluto, we especially don't sell tickets to ladies."

"But I know this ship is on special charter to go beyond Pluto. That's why I want to go."

"Do you mean to tell me that you did not know that women are not allowed to fly in space ships?"

"Who doesn't allow them?" Rage flared in the violet eyes. "Show me the law or the regulation—"

"There is no law, no regulation." He groaned and shook his head, mentally cursing all Sunday supplement writers. They talked of space-flight in glowing terms, they presented space-flight as the great adventure of the human soul, which it was. The trouble with space-flight did not lie in the human soul, it lay in another organ, the human stomach.

The human mind might be able to solve the intricate engineering and scientific problems connected with space-flight but the human stomach would have no truck with such nonsense. No gravity, no digestion, seemed to be the stomach's motto. Keep your feet on the ground, bub, if you want to live in peace with me.

A queer, a cantankerous, perhaps an evil breed of men manned the space ships. But they were *men*. The big sign was written in neon letters a mile high in the sky.

FOR MEN ONLY

The sign meant exactly what it said. Men who went to space made a pact with the Devil. In effect they agreed to cut their throats. Or they might as well have cut their throats, they had such little use for them.

The stomach, evolved under conditions that included the strong pull of gravity, simply revolted when the zone of no-gravity was reached. With weightlessness came nausea. It wasn't simple nausea like a little stomach-ache, it was a bitter binding groaning never-ending ache, a sickness that refused all food except a few concentrates and a special vitamin pill. Men who met space-nausea—and all who went to space met it—regarded an attack of ptomaine poison as only a minor irritation.

If the stomach refused ordinary food it also would have nothing to do with water. To make water acceptable, and

then only a few drops at a time, it had to be heavily treated with chemicals. And its taste was such that generations of spacemen had agreed that it was made of a mixture of sulphur, epsom salts and drainings from the bottoms of the stables of hell.

SPACE-NAUSEA was the reason men were signed up as potential spacemen at the age of sixteen, the reason they went to space at eighteen. Youthful bodies were better equipped to withstand the effects of this sickness. At thirty they were all used up and were retired to live out their lives in little houses clustered around the spaceports, where they grew old in peace—and watched the ships manned by younger men blast off into the sky.

So much was true of spacemen. As for spacewomen, there weren't any. If the stomach of the male revolted when it hit the no-grav zone the stomach of the female went stark raving crazy. There was some difference in secretion between male and female stomachs or between the secretion of organs affecting the stomach, some subtle distinction that no biochemist had as yet analyzed, which made it almost impossible for women to cross space. Whole laboratories full of medicos and biochemists and biotechnicians had tried to solve this problem without any luck.

It was the biggest problem slowing the proper development of new frontiers. Men needed women, their ancient helpmeet who has come with them along all the paths their feed have trod. Earth-path, sea-path, sky-path, star-path. They needed women on Mars and Venus, not only because they were a biological necessity but because of a spiritual hunger for their presence.

When the first cave man looked out at the stars in the sky and wondered what those bright lights were, a woman stood right behind him, wondering too. And probably urging him to go find out. When men first crossed the oceans of Earth, opening new continents, their

women had gone with them.

But they weren't going with them to the planets. Man's ancient helpmeet was Earthbound.

Women had tried. They had learned to hold their noses and drink space-water and live on vitamins. Three women had actually got through to Venus in badly emaciated condition. One had reached Mars. She ruled there as a virtual queen among spacemen.

The women of earth knew all this or should have known it. But apparently Miss Frances Marion was an exception. Eric Gaunt shook his head, wondering whether she didn't know or whether she was just stubborn.

"But I know all about space-sickness!" Her words were hard little bullets of sound, striving to penetrate his understanding and possibly his sympathy. "I'm willing to face that. I'm not afraid."

"How do you know about it?"

"Why—" It was a question she apparently had not been expecting and for which she had to find a hasty answer. "I—I've read the books. I know what it's like. I—"

"You've read the books!" If there was mockery in his voice it was not intended as such. All he was expressing was the sure knowledge which he had and which she didn't have of the real meaning of space-sickness. Reading all the books on Earth would never give anybody an adequate understanding of this ailment.

"You can learn a lot from books!" She heard the mockery in his voice and responded to it with active hostility—or perhaps she was only trying to forestall what she knew he was going to say.

"I don't doubt that. I plan to read a lot of them, beginning a couple of years from now. The point is—" His voice was gentle. He saw the longing on her face, understood her desire to go into space. He was being as kind as he could, as pleasant, and he was trying hard to let her down easily.

She flared words at him. "What is the point? Are you trying to tell me I can't

go on this trip?"

"I'm telling you exactly that." He watched her face change. She had set her heart on making this trip.

"But you've got to take me. I've got a ticket."

"The company will refund your money."

"I don't want my money, I want passage. You have no authority to refuse to honor my ticket."

She was about forty miles off base here but she didn't know it.

"I'm sorry," he repeated.

"Why won't you take me?" Anger showed in the tone of her voice. "You've got to take me, you've—"

He had tried to be nice, now he was blunt. "Because your little tummy won't stand the trip. Miss, we're going beyond Pluto—can't you understand?" To him, the words carried real meaning but they didn't seem to carry the same meaning to her.

"What about *your* little tummy?"

"It won't stand the trip either."

"Then what do you do when it fails to stand the trip?"

"I sweat it out." Considering the real effect of space-nausea, this was as tremendous an understatement as a space-man could make.

"Then I'll sweat it out too. My equipment and luggage are already aboard. Have someone show me to my cabin, Captain Gaunt."

Anyhow she had courage. Eric the Gaunt respected that. But he respected space-sickness even more. Also, she was giving him his orders. She ought to know better. This was *his* ship, *he* was captain, *he* gave the orders. Very gently he took her elbow.

"Keep your hands off of me!" She guessed what he was going to do. His face stung as her palm hit it. He laughed as you would laugh at an errant child. "Will you go without trouble or—"

"I won't go at all."

Eric the Gaunt was a patient man but this went beyond the limits of his patience. He could have called a mate or

a crewman but he did the job himself. He swept her up in his arms, ignoring kicking knees and scratching fingers, carried her to the loading ramp, set her down and gave her back her papers. He would have tipped his hat to her but she had already knocked it off.

She stood there for perhaps two minutes, an angry defiant bitter little figure, trying to make up her mind whether to cry or to explode. Then she ran down the ramp and toward the administration building. Eric watched her leave.

Tilly gave him back his cap. "She wanted to go with us on this hop?"

Eric fixed him with a cold and merciless eye. "Yellow," he said.

The big mate grinned easily. "Heck, Eric, you do jobs like that better than I do. Did she actually want to go with us?" Eric nodded.

"Well, all I can say is the world is full of fools," the mate answered.

"That is hardly an original discovery," Eric answered. Looking down he saw a taxi arrive beyond the gate, saw three men emerge from it and look toward the ship. Their passengers, he did not doubt, the astronomers who were going beyond Pluto to observe a dust cloud.

"Here come three more now."

CHAPTER II

Deviation

ONE astronomer was tall and skinny, one was short and one was in between. Unruh was the tall one, Paul the short one and the middle-sized one was named Wellman. Eric shook hands with them. Although they were within a year of his own age, he regarded them as kids. But he treated them politely.

"Gentlemen, have you ever been in space?"

"No, we haven't," Wellman answered. The passenger list showed this kid as

a Ph.D. and Eric wondered whether he ought to call him Dr. Wellman, decided against it.

Wellman grinned. "I understand it's rather on the rough side. We were selected with the idea in mind that we are young enough to make the trip. We'll try not to make too much trouble."

"When do we blast off?" Unruh interrupted. There was an air of eagerness about the tall astronomer. His eyes roved continuously about the ship and the expression in them was that of a man whose fondest dream is finally coming true. Eric Gaunt regarded him thoughtfully, not liking this eagerness.

"In a hurry to get away?" Eric spoke.

"Well—when I was a kid I wanted to be a spaceman. But my folks wouldn't let me. Now I have the chance which they denied me." The words poured from his lips and his eyes glinted with anger, directed apparently at his parents. Wellman shuffled his feet apologetically. "If you will show us to our quarters, captain . . ."

"Sure," Eric said. It was not his business. They were within the age limits, they were male, they had been selected for this trip, they were old enough to know what they were going up against. A bustling fat-hipped cabin boy, on his first trip out, took them away.

Tilly looked after them. "Some people don't know how lucky they are to have folks with good sense," he muttered. "When I wanted to sign articles my old man said to me, 'Well, Joe, experience is a hard school but fools will learn in no other.' At the time I thought he was the fool."

"What do you think now?" Eric questioned.

"I'm surprised at how smart a man my daddy was," the mate answered promptly. His eyes went up to the far-away sky. A shudder ran through his big body.

"If you think you are a fool to go to space again you can sign off." Eric spoke sharply. "I take no man with me who doesn't want to go."

"Aw, Eric, I was only kidding. Whenever you fly her, kid, I'll ride her. You know that." The big mate grinned again, an expression that made his scarred face a friendly mask.

"Sure, Tilly." Eric offered a cigarette to the mate, took one himself, lit it in the camaraderie that made formal discipline unnecessary on such ships as this, let the smoke seep into his lungs. From the nose of the ship came the rattle of winches swinging supplies into the forward hold. He listened.

Off in the distance were the towers of Chicago. He looked at them, wondering about the people who lived around them, wondering how they lived and what they did, knowing that never in his life would he quite understand the activities of landsmen.

He belonged to space—he had never lived a normal life—and even when space was through with him, he would still belong to the far-off sky. From where he stood he could see a row of old spacemen lounging along the rail of the spaceport tower, smoking pipes and watching this ship load, dreaming of the days when they had flown in such ships. You could ground a spaceman's body but you could not ground his soul. As his stomach belonged to Earth, so his soul belonged to space.

"Move over, boys, and make room for me," Eric Gaunt thought. He snubbed the half-smoked cigarette in the ashtray with unnecessary violence. The big mate looked at him from sympathetic eyes. The girl came out of the administration building. A fat man was with her.

They had a mild argument with the gateman but both exhibited papers and were passed through.

"Here she comes again," the mate said. "Eric, I'd better get up and see about that stuff being stowed."

"Yellow," Eric repeated. "Okay, beat it. I'll face her." As the mate retreated he hitched up his pants and prepared himself to meet Miss Frances Marion again.

With every inch of her body bristling

defiance of all space-ship captains she came stamping up the ramp.

The fat man, it turned out, was a lawyer she had summoned by phone from the administration building. He carried a thick volume which he opened.

"Captain Gaunt, I should like to read to you the twenty-eighth Amendment to the Constitution of Earth Government, which was ratified and passed one year ago by Pakistan. With this ratification a majority of the Federated States have passed this amendment and it has therefore become binding upon all citizens of Earth."

"Read on," Eric said. "Turn loose your artillery, whatever it is."

The lawyer took a deep breath. "No discrimination of any nature whatsoever shall exist between citizens of Earth for reasons of sex."

CLOSING his mouth and the book the lawyer looked expectantly at Eric Gaunt. "I guess that does it, Captain." Apparently he thought he had said something. The girl seemed to think so too. A smile of triumph appeared on her face.

"Please have someone show me to my cabin, Captain," she said.

Eric Gaunt said slowly, a little mystified, "This beats me. It really does. Have they actually passed a law like that?"

"They most certainly have," the lawyer answered.

"This is the first I have heard of it."

"Ignorance is no excuse. It simply means you cannot deny passage to my client because she is a woman."

"I can't, eh?"

"No, you can't. I admit that to my knowledge this is the first time the question has come up in regard to space-travel but the principle is well established."

"Good," Eric said. "We've been trying to lick space-sickness for a long time. I'm glad to learn that they have finally passed a law about it."

"Will power would have solved the problem of space-sickness at any time,"

the girl interrupted.

"It would?" Even under this provocation Eric Gaunt kept his temper. Probably he would have continued to keep it but the attorney spoke again, laying down the law.

"You will either admit my client to this ship as a passenger or I will slap a World Court injunction on you."

This was too much even for Eric Gaunt. "Then you had better start slapping," he said.

"What?" the lawyer gasped. Mighty corporations trembled at the threat of a World Court injunction, nations backed down, diplomats got out their striped pants and strove manfully to ease troubled waters in the face of such a threat.

"Before I get out my copy of space-ship regulations and show you a law passed by the World Congress which says that the authority of a space-ship captain shall be final, not only in so far as his crew and cargo are concerned, but also in the matter of passengers. I don't have to take any crewman, any cargo or any passenger I don't want to take, for any reason or for no reason."

For a moment the lawyer's mouth hung open. This was the first time he had ever dealt with a space captain. To him this captain looked like a kid who would be easily overawed. "I am aware—" he began.

"And I don't choose to take a woman on the long hop," Eric continued. "My decision is final and there is no appeal."

"There seems to be some contradiction in regulations," the lawyer sputtered.

"There is none so far as I am concerned," Eric answered. He turned to the girl. "Please believe me. I am taking this action in your interest. If I took you with me the odds are I would bring back a corpse."

"But I'm willing to take that chance," the girl blazed at him. "You spacemen have hypnotized yourselves into believing that space-sickness is the most terrible thing that can happen to a person. You have set up a mental block which

makes it impossible for you to believe anything else. Even if you had a cure offered you on a silver platter your mental block is so strong that the cure wouldn't work—because you wouldn't believe it *could* work."

For a long moment he stared at her. Here was courage of a kind he understood and admired. Or was it stupidity? He did not know, had no way to find out. But he knew space-sickness. If he admitted this girl on the strength of her statement that will power could control the nausea he knew existed, the consequences would be upon his own head and he would have to live with them the rest of his life.

All over the Solar System spacemen would speak of Eric the Gaunt, who had taken a woman passenger on the long hop. They would regard him as a fool and, regarding him in this light, they would not sign on with him. It had happened before. Adam Nish, skipper of the old *Belmont*, had taken a woman passenger. Adam had retired at twenty-seven, simply because no spacemen would serve under a captain they regarded as an idiot.

Eric shook his head.

"I'm sorry."

"Then you still won't take me?"

"I cannot take that chance."

Blazing anger shouted at him from the violet eyes. "You are an obstinate pig-headed jackass."

"And so are you," he answered. "The only difference is that I am captain of this ship. I'm responsible for the safety of passengers, crew and cargo and you are not. Good day."

The last he saw of them they were stalking into the spaceport administration building. The lawyer was waving his hands in expostulation and the girl's back was still bristling with indignation.

"She's a right determined young lady," the mate said, reappearing.

"She is that," Eric answered musingly. "You know, if you could get a girl like that to love you as hard as she fights

you..." He paused and tried to frame what he wanted to say next.

THE mate said it for him. The bull bellow broke into a sound that was clearly and distinctly an imitation of a giggle. Eric the Gaunt blushed from his Adam's apple to his hairline.

"You get the hell up and see if those astronomers are strapped in their bunks for blast-off!" he shouted.

"You bet," the mate answered. But as he exited the gurgle-giggle was still sounding deep in his throat.

"You sound like a bullfrog trying to sing tenor!" Eric shouted after him. But Tilly was gone. For a moment Eric stared after him. Then he relaxed, grinning. He could take kidding. But he did feel sorry for the girl. She had been willing to face space. That fact awed him. But she was talking nonsense when she said spacemen had hypnotized themselves into believing in space sickness. There was more to it than that—a damned sight more.

There was some slight delay in loading the last of the boxes into the forward hold and blast-off was delayed for an hour. Then the steel ports were swung ponderously shut and were sealed air-tight as the tough bubble of steel and plastic was prepared for her trip. Tractors pulled the *Martian Bounce* away from the loading ramp.

From the engine room that ran all along the bottom of her scarred hull, to the observation domes in the top of the ship, to the control room in the nose, captain, officers and crew took up their ready positions. Huge tugs lumbered up and hooked on fore and aft with magnetic grapples. With the tugs lifting and her own jets blasting she pushed herself upward. The tugs cast off and she roared away under her own power.

She would be gone nine months. She would reach maximum acceleration in about five days. From then on, except for thrusts from the steering jets necessary to hold her on course, she would coast to her destination. Arriving at the

space area beyond Pluto, she would be brought into proper position for the astronomers to study the cloud of meteoric material there.

A cloud of such dust might sweep all life from one of the planets. It might color the seas and poison them, it might cloud the atmosphere, even change slightly the orbit of a planet. Whether it would do any of these things was problematical but certainly it would disrupt the lives and the stomachs of the crew and passengers of the good ship *Martian Bounce*. As she moved into the no-grav zone the doctor began his regular rounds.

Two days out Tillie reported to his captain on the matter of a nuisance. "That tall skinny astronomer, Unruh, is all over the ship. The chief has thrown him bodily out of the engine room. He tried to talk a steersman into standing his watch. He's got his nose into everything. What'll we do with him?"

"Let him have fun," Eric answered. "He won't have it long." As he spoke he burped—the first sign of protest from his internal regions.

Ten days later Earth was a silver star, so far away they could hardly tell it from the other stars littering the sky. Not that anybody looked to see. Space nausea was on every man of them, the biting torture of a disordered stomach, the slow ache of beginning tissue hunger.

As the nausea hit him at full force, the griping sickness that turned men into boil-sore hotheads, Eric Gaunt thought again of the glowing phrases the supplement writers used to describe spacemen. Men who dared death, they called them, among other things. As if any man who had ever met space-sickness would ever regard death as a dangerous enemy.

Stubbornness, this was the quality that made spacemen. Men who could look the Devil in the face and spit in his eye.

Yet in spite of the life that spacemen led the ships kept flying. The training

schools had to limit their applicants. If this was heroism of a high order, meriting the biggest decoration ever awarded by any government on Earth, spacemen would be the last to admit it. And the last to get it.

Eric the Gaunt was proud to be a spaceman. So was every other member of the crew. They formed a tight fraternity of the super-elect, the super-fit. They had the ability to get the job done when there wasn't a one of them who wasn't sick to the bottom of his soul. Eric saw the plump cabin boy, his face suddenly turning green, stumble blindly into the head, retch his insides out and come back again to the duty of cleaning up his own mess.

"You'll make a spaceman, kid," the captain said.

The kid's eyes glowed. "Gee, thanks," he muttered from between clenched teeth.

Space flight was a sieve through which a chunk of the human race was being pressed like grapes through a wine press. Out of the alchemy of torture would come a new race, fit to . . . No, the new race would not come. You don't breed up a new race with only one sex. And man's helpmeet was Earth-bound.

Eric thought of the girl, Frances Marion. He was glad she wasn't here in this zone of agony—but he was sorry too. Her presence might have made his own discomfort a little more endurable. For uncounted centuries women had helped in this way. But they could help no longer. When he returned to Earth he would try to find her and explain again . . .

The ship's doctor came to see him in his cabin. Wellman was with him. Eric had not seen the doctor of philosophy for several days, presumably the astronomer had been in his bunk. Certainly in this appearance he looked like a man who had been through a bad time. His face was gaunt, he hadn't shaved, his hands were shaky.

"A little rough, eh, Wellman?"

"Damned rough, captain. But we'll make it—that is—"

"We came to speak to you about Unruh," the doctor said. "He is showing signs of intense strain."

"Eh? What kind of strain?"

"Mental."

"I am afraid I have been somewhat remiss in my duty," Wellman said. "But the truth is I have had other things to think about. As you no doubt recall, when he first came aboard, Unruh told you he had wanted to go to spaceschool but parental objection had made it impossible for him to go. The truth is he *did* go to spaceschool but was washed out because of emotional instability."

"I see," Eric said. He remembered he had had doubts about Unruh. "What's happened?"

"Now that he has been hit hard by space sickness and his entire body has been thrown out of balance this hidden emotional instability has come to light," the doctor said. "They must have caught this hidden taint in spaceschool and washed him out because of it. Now, *we've* got him on our hands." The doctor's shrug said that personally he already had his hands full and wanted no part of any nutty landsman.

UNRUH, in his cabin, was a gaunt ghost when the three entered. He looked as if he had lost twenty pounds, his frame was skin and bones. His eyes were wild. He struggled to his feet.

"Captain, I've been wanting to see you but this fool has kept me from you." A jerk of his thumb indicated the ship's doctor. "Captain, this ship must be set on a course for the stars. I am destined to be the first man to make star flight."

There was more of it. Eric didn't listen. He had heard it before. They called it space strain. But the delusion that Unruh was destined to make the first star flight was odd. Usually victims of space strain wanted only one thing—to get their feet back on the ground—and demanded that the ship be taken immediately back to a planet.

Outside in the corridor he said to the doctor, "Will he live out the trip?"

The doctor shrugged. "You know as much about that as I do, Eric. We'll feed him by force if necessary."

"What about his mental condition?"

"Sometimes, when they get their feet back on the ground again, they get well. Sometimes they don't."

"What about this delusion that he wants to go to the stars?"

No man had ever gone to the stars. The distance was too great.

"Probably, when he was a kid, he dreamed about flying to the stars," the doctor said. "When he was washed out of spaceschool the dream exploded. Now it has come back, only it isn't a dream any longer—it's a driving compulsion."

"What do you recommend?"

"Sedation, intravenous feeding if necessary, keeping him locked in his cabin. It's not the best treatment but it's all we can give out here."

Eric nodded. It was the only order he needed to give. "Tough," he said to Wellman. "Can you and Paul carry on your duties without the help of Unruh?"

"We can try," Wellman said. Eric didn't tell this middle-sized astronomer that he had the makings of a good space-man in him but he felt like it. "Sorry about Unruh. If I can help you in any way please let me know."

A month passed. The Sun was a ball far away. Over on their right Jupiter was looming up like a small sun. They saw Saturn, wearing its rings like a halo against black space. The cloud of dust was still not visible to the naked eye but Wellman and Paul, with special telescopic equipment mounted in the observation dome, were watching it. Unruh, after a period of intravenous feeding, was showing signs of recovery, the doctor thought.

Sickness gripped the ship. Wellman and Paul, to whom this bitter nausea was new, were trying hard to go about their duties. The officers and crew, to

whom this sickness was old stuff, were doing their jobs. The new cabin boy had lost all his plumpness—his clothes hung on him like rags on a scarecrow.

"Haven't they tried to lick this space-sickness?" Wellman asked one day in Eric's cabin.

"They've tried everything including standing on their heads," Eric answered. "There is hardly a trip when we don't have some new pill to try. Nothing works."

He broke off as Tilly hastily entered the cabin.

"Eric, damn it—"

At the tone of the mate's voice Eric instantly cocked his ear to the sounds of the ship in an automatic attempt to locate the source of the trouble he saw so heavily written in the scarred face. But the ship was functioning smoothly. His trained ear told him everything was all right.

What then was wrong?

CHAPTER III

Stowaway?

ERIC, we've got a stowaway!" The clang of the radar-actuated bells warning of the approach of a meteor would, not have aroused Eric Gaunt so rapidly as did the single word *stowaway*. Not only because the loading platforms were well guarded but because the reputation of the ships was well known, stowaways simply didn't happen. Nobody but an idiot ever space-hopped. Eric Gaunt came to his feet. "Where is he?"

"In the forward hold. I just caught a glimpse—"

"Come on!"

The mate and the cabin boy dug him out. He had come aboard in a big, packing box and had obviously made this box his sleeping and living quarters. All they could see at first was the end of a

leg clad in blue overalls. The mate grabbed this leg. The sound from the box was a startled "*Eek!*"

"Come out of there!" The mate yanked hard on the leg. The stowaway came sprawling out of the box, face downward, then put out a hand and lifted himself to his feet.

"Holy hell!" the mate breathed.

The stowaway wasn't a he. Clad in dingy blue overalls that had obviously belonged to some dock laborer, the stowaway was Frances Marion.

Her composure was remarkable. Digging in one pocket, she produced a crumpled wad of papers from which she selected one.

"My ticket, Captain."

Eric the Gaunt stood looking at her. Her face was not as clean as it had been when he had first seen her and there were circles under her eyes. Some of the rounded contours were gone from her hips. Knowing what it meant, he would rather have seen anybody else here than this girl.

Any emergency that the ship might meet he could handle. He would lose neither his temper nor his poise nor would any situation upset his finely-balanced judgment. But when he tried to speak to this girl he choked instead.

"Don't take it so hard, Captain. You look as if you were seeing a ghost."

"Perhaps I am," he spoke. "Do you know it is too late to turn back?"

"I hope so."

"Do you know you have probably committed suicide?"

"If I have it is my life I am throwing away."

She still had her courage.

"I'm sorry," he said, his voice still choked. "We'll do the best we can for you. As soon as you are settled in a cabin I'll send the doctor along. Perhaps . . ."

"Why do you think I will need a doctor?" she spoke.

The question dazed him. He knew why she would need a doctor, need him as she had never needed one before in

all her life. Then he remembered. She had been here a month already. The effect of that month was obvious on her face and on her body but she was still in control of herself and if she was suffering she was keeping it hidden. The Spartan boy who had let a fox gnaw his vitals rather than cry out had not done a better job than she was doing.

"Haven't you had space-sickness?" The words shot from his lips.

"I guess so." Her answer was indifferent. "I haven't felt so well. But—"

"What have you had to eat and drink?"

"The same food that you and all the others have eaten—concentrates and special vitamins. I've drunk space-water. I took the liberty of opening some of the ship's supplies." She nodded toward the boxes stored in the hold. "I hope you don't mind." Mockery crept into her voice. "But—"

"And you haven't had space-sickness?"

"How would I know what space-sickness is?" she shrugged. "For that matter I told you I wasn't going to have it, that space-sickness is largely auto-hypnosis."

Eric Gaunt groaned. "I think you're probably so sick you don't know what you're doing but you're just too damned stubborn to admit it." He gestured to the cabin boy. "Take her to cabin nine."

He watched her follow the cabin boy out of the hold.

There was the trace of a smile on her face.

"She's in a state of space-strain and doesn't know," the big mate breathed huskily in his ear.

"Get the doctor," Eric said.

The medico reported to him later in his cabin. The doctor was a harassed man. "I can't tell for sure what her condition is. She's had space-sickness, I'll bet on that, but how light or how heavy it was I don't know. Her heart action is all right, her reflexes are normal. We'll just have to wait and see."

A N HOUR later Eric passed cabin nine. The sound of singing came from inside. He listened a moment, his heart in his mouth. Had space-strain hit her? Was this her reaction to it? He listened. No, the voice was clear, the notes were on key.

*"We'll say goodbye to Mars
And blast off to the stars..."*

It was the oldest, simplest, most moving of all the songs that spacemen sang. They sang it in space school. Rolling dead drunk down the streets of a Martian city they sang this song. The tune was simple—any man could carry it. The words were even simpler—any man could learn them. But the spirit of the song was something that only a spaceman could grasp.

*"We'll aim her at the sky
We'll come back by-and-by.
Or maybe never."*

A rolling chorus should blast out the words, "Or maybe never!" A hundred voices should sing this song. In it spacemen expressed their defiance of space, of space-sickness, of the vast uncharted depths of space that lay out yonder beyond the Solar System, where the Big Man Ocean began...

In this song that spacemen sang the human soul defied the whole universe, saying to the very stars in the farthest depths of space, "Move over, bud, we're coming your way."

And one girl, singing alone in her cabin, was getting as much defiance into her voice as could a hundred spacemen.

Eric the Gaunt knocked on the door. The song faded into silence. The girl stood there.

"Thanks," he said and fled. If this was space-strain he did not choose to identify it. And he did not know what he was thanking her for except possibly for being alive.

In the days and the weeks that followed the girl became a problem to the

captain, the doctor and the crew of the *Martian Bounce*. The doctor practically forced her to submit to examination every twenty-four hours. After each examination he reported back to his captain.

"Eric, that girl has touches of sickness—but not bad." More and more the doctor was beginning to look like a man refusing to believe the evidence of his own tests.

"Why?" Eric demanded.

"She says the answer is will power," the doctor answered. He pointed to the steel bulkhead of the cabin. "Eric, do you mind if I butt my head against that?"

"I don't mind. Just leave a little room for me."

They reached their destination. The ship was not stopped, she was set to move in a great circle that would keep her out of the dust cloud but would still come close enough to it to enable the two astronomers to make their needed observations.

The observations dome now looked out on what spacemen called the Big Man Ocean—Space beyond Pluto . . .

Space-ships had been here before, to take a good soul-shocking mind-searing peek at the vastness of deep space itself. Like bugs the human race crawled across the Solar System, like flying midges they hopped from planet to planet.

They got illusions about how important they were, how great were their accomplishments in hopping from island to island around their sun. Then they came up here and looked at the Big Man Ocean. Like puppies who have grown up to be dogs and have gone lion hunting they came up here—and found their lion.

Here the planet-hopping bugs saw how big they were, here the grown dogs saw their lion. Here men got small again, here they saw the vastness of this mighty universe, the stars stretching on and on forever until the mind reeled from the attempt just to count them.

Here men, even spacemen, became humble.

It's a mighty big ocean whose icy invisible waves lap Pluto's shores.

In the observation dome, Eric Gaunt stood looking out. If there were any feelings in him they were under tight control. A long, long time before some of his ancestors had stood on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, as he stood now beyond Pluto, staring at Old Ocean, wondering what lay beyond the gray waste of waters.

They had needed something. They hadn't know exactly what it was but they had gone looking beyond the waters for what they needed. Perhaps they had found a part of what they sought in a land called America but they hadn't found all of it. Something was still missing, something was still needed. Did it lie out yonder in the stars?

No man knew the answer to that question but all men knew they would go look if they could. He caught a trace of sound, a hummed song.

"And blast off to the stars . . ."

At the sound of the spacemen's song the feelings under tight control deep within him threatened to erupt. He jerked his head around. There was a time and a place for defiance, a time and a place for being humble. If spacemen defied the universe it was because they knew themselves to be inadequate to cope with him.

The girl stood at his elbow looking out. "Surely it doesn't awe a space-ship captain?" Her voice was brittle, taut, tight.

"You hopeless idiot—" Then he saw her eyes and tried to catch the words. "I'm sorry." There were tears in her eyes. She wasn't needling him, she wasn't defying him, she was scared literally half to death.

It struck him suddenly that the first time he had seen her she had been scared of him, of the mate, of the ship, perhaps of something else. Now she had

seen the sight that even spacemen dread and the fear had come out of her in tears which she could no longer control.

"I'm sorry, too, Eric. I didn't mean it the way it sounded."

On her face the tears were plainly visible now.

HIS arm went out around her and she came to its protection as if it were some long-sought haven, a shelter desperately needed.

Transmitted by the steel hull, from the nose of the ship came the sound of a steering jet changing the ship's course. It was instantly followed by the full-throated roar of a driving rocket from the stern.

In that moment Eric Gaunt forgot this girl and everything else—except one thing. The ship was changing course without orders. Acceleration was being applied, also without orders. As he started for the door that led downward from the observation dome that door was thrust violently open by the mate, seeking him.

"Eric, that Unruh got out of his cabin and into the control room. He slugged the steersman and he's in the control room now, changing the course and the speed of the ship."

The yaw of the ship was obvious. Eric leaped to the observation dome. It was hard to tell exactly what new course was being applied but it looked as if Unruh, in the control room, were taking the *Martian Bounce* straight out into space.

"Go to the engine room and tell the chief to disconnect fuel lines leading to all steering jets and to the main drive."

"Yes, sir."

The mate was gone.

Eric and the girl followed him down the steps. In the passage leading to the control room in the nose they found the steersman who had been on duty, getting groggily to his feet. A three-inch section of his scalp had been laid open.

The door of the control room was closed. Eric jerked down on the han-

dle. It did not budge. The door was locked on the inside. It was made of steel one-quarter inch thick.

"Cutting torches from the shop," Eric said. All controls were behind that locked door, including communication with the engine room. The crew was already reporting. The doctor was there, passing out pills. Wellman and Paul were there.

"We had just determined that there is no danger to the Solar System from this dust cloud," Wellman said. "It is not on a collision course with our system." He spoke in the tone of a man who has just made an important discovery and is determined to report the fact even though he knows it is no longer of any importance—to him anyhow.

The roar of the driving rockets went into silence. Tilly, his face grimy, came up from below. "The chief says they're cut and he can cut 'em back in when you order it. But he says the lines ought to be cleaned before they're cut back in again because of the danger of fuel leakage. What next, Eric?"

The ship was no longer accelerating. But it was headed out into space and they could do nothing to change its direction until they got into the control room.

The torches arrived. They cut the hinges out of the door, then the lock. The door went down.

Unruh was in there. He cringed away from them as they entered, expecting punishment.

"Come along, son," Eric said. His face was gray. There was nausea inside of him that was tying his stomach into knots. The doctor and two crewmen took Unruh away. He went meekly. Here in this control room the psychosis that had driven him had been washed out as a stain is washed out of dirty linen.

Eric the Gaunt stood with his hands on his hips, looking at the control room. Behind him, the mate was cursing, softly, all the oaths that spacemen knew.

When the fuel was cut off Unruh had apparently gone berserk. With a heavy wrench he had pounded the control panels to broken fragments of shattered plastic, he had beaten the view-radar screen into bits of glass, he had smashed and pounded the heavy tubular chair where the steersman sat. He had even attacked and tried to smash the heavy plastic window that formed an eye-level viewpoint around the nose of the ship.

"That empty-headed son of hell," the mate said.

"Get the electrician," Eric ordered.

As he spoke, the whole vessel vibrated like an immense bell. A pea-sized meteor had struck somewhere and this sound was the result.

"Did you hear that?" the mate said.

"I heard it. Get the electrician." Sick-ness was in his voice and his stomach felt like an old dishrag tied into a knot and dried in this condition. He moved to the viewport, knowing what he was looking for, knowing that he did not want to see it. The navigator's instruments were there, in position over the log-book stand.

At this short distance he needed less than a minute to determine direction of flight and what was going to happen unless they could prevent it.

CHAPTER IV

Steaks Coming Up

WHAT he did next was strictly an automatic reaction, an act performed without conscious direction while under the effect of strain amounting almost to full shock. Picking up the pen, he wrote in the log:

Control room taken over by insane passenger. All controls are smashed. Astrogration discloses that ship is now on collision course with cloud of me-

teoric dust which we have been observ-
ing . . .

He dated the entry to the hour and the minute and signed his name—*Eric Gaunt, Captain*—without really noticing what he was doing. He wondered if anywhere, at any time, any man would read the entry he had just written.

The mate entered with the electrician. "Get everybody who can scrape insulation off of two wires and wrap them together on this job."

"Right."

The control room filled up with gaunt angry sweaty men. Eric was a merciless master, riding them with the gentlest voice that ever spoke the English language. They were humping themselves as only well co-ordinated men can move, clearing away the smashed control panels, identifying twisted and broken wires, fitting them to new switches.

Tilly took a quiet look at the log book. "Uh—Eric," he said. "You know about it, huh?"

"The first meteor was enough warning."

"The first one?"

As if the words were prophecy, again the ship vibrated like a mighty bell. The men working on the smashed panels knew perfectly well what the sound meant. At all times such as this a constant telepathic flow seemed to exist among all members of the crew but they did not look up. They merely worked faster.

"Close all airtight doors," Eric ordered. "Detail every man not urgently needed elsewhere to hull inspection. Put them into space-suits. You take personal charge."

"Right." The mate was gone.

The girl twisted into the control room, went from man to man, handing out something. She came to Eric, offered a small red pill. "Doctor's orders," she said. "He thinks maybe they'll help."

He gulped it down.

The ship had her nose on Antares.

Out of the corner of his eyes Eric watched the star. Antares was dimming fast.

The particles of dust and tiny meteors would strip the hull from a spaceship the way a monkey strips a banana.

Bong went the bell again, more heavily this time.

"That one was as big as a marble," Eric thought. A taw, maybe, a shooter that kids use in smooth places on vacant lots.

Tilly came in. "We got a hole in the observation dome. Three feet long and about an inch across, a regular slit. They're patching it now." His eyes went to the men working on the smashed panels but he did not inquire about the progress being made there.

"Have the chief turn the fuel back on," Eric said.

"Okay. But—"

"Just in case we should be able to blow a tube."

"Right."

"And all of us must die because one man went insane?" The girl spoke.

"Insane men and insane ideas have killed more men than all the wars in history," Eric said. "I don't blame Unruh. He just tried to do what all of us have wanted to but haven't dared attempt. Some day, when we lick our stomachs, we'll jump off into the Big Man Ocean. And we'll be sane men doing it. All he did was try it ahead of time."

The girl watched him in silence. "You are a rather remarkable person."

HE JERKED his thumb toward the men who were humping themselves. "If I am remarkable so are they. We're just spacemen. Remember the song—"

Her voice lifted.

"We'll aim her at the sky

"We'll come back by-and-by..."

There were eleven men working in that control room and eleven voices

picked up the chorus of that song. Maybe they didn't roar it but they sang it as best they could.

"AND MAYBE NEVER."

As they sang they worked faster. Eric saw they were working faster. Fatigue and the terrible knotting of their stomachs ought to have been pulling them down but somehow it wasn't.

"Keep on singing," he whispered.

From the floor the electrician wiggled a beckoning finger at him. He dropped to his knees beside the man.

"Eric, the timers are out of the circuit, but I've got the steering controls jerry-rigged. This button controls the port tubes, this one controls the starboard. But there is no way to time the blast."

"We'll time it by instinct," Eric answered. He picked up the telephone to the engine room. "We're going to blow."

"Right." The gnarled voice of the chief engineer came back at him. "If fuel has leaked into the tubes we'll blow ourselves straight to Kingdom Come. But blow her, boy, blow her."

The chief engineer was a decrepit old relic of a spaceman, all of twenty-nine years old. He regarded every other member of the crew as a paling boy, including the captain. "Blow her, boy, blow her." He repeated the words.

Eric grunted. With no hesitation whatsoever he pressed the button that blew the starboard jet. The chorus roared out.

"And maybe never..."

He shook the sound out of his ears. From somewhere almost directly below him came another sound, the roar of a functioning jet. It was a smooth roar, the sweetest sound he had ever heard. He lifted his head, lined up the dimly-visible Antares with the edge of the visionport. Slowly, ever so slowly, the image of the star vanished. The ship was swinging away from collision

course in response to the thrust of the steering jet.

He took his finger off the button. The jet went into silence. In the control cabin was another sound—that of men cheering. They were slapping him on the back, slapping each other. The song was rising again.

"We'll aim her at the sky..."

It was a blast of sound, expressing defiance of all space, of space-sickness and of the Big Man Ocean, whose icy invisible waves lapped just outside the stout steel hull of the *Martian Bounce*.

AN HOUR later he left the control room. The ship was firmly on a new course. Stern rockets were roaring again. She was going home now, her mission finished. Back to Earth, back to the green planet across the wastes of space.

The girl was in her cabin. She came quickly to the door at his knock.

"I'm hungry," he said.

She stared at him.

"I could eat a beefsteak, I could drink a barrel of water. And I'm not sick." His voice expressed sure knowledge that a miracle had happened far beyond the miracle of the repairs in the control room, greater than the swinging of the ship away from her collision course.

He spoke slowly, measuring the words one by one. "No pill put together by any ship's doctor could make me hungry or could take away the nausea from inside of me."

She still stared at him as if she did not begin to understand the meaning of what he said.

"Who are you?" he said.

"I'm a biochemist."

"I thought so. And what are you doing on my ship?"

"Running a test on my stomach—and on your stomach too and on the stomach of every man in the control room at the end. Tell me—how do you feel?" She

caught the lapels of his coat, held on to them.

"You gave me a red pill. What was it?"

"The newest product of the department of biochemistry. A special development designed as a remedy for space-sickness. Did it work?"

"Why didn't you tell us what you were doing? Why didn't you bring them out sooner? Why all this yak-yak about will power if you had something. Why didn't—"

"For two reasons. First, you spacemen do have a powerful psychological block that makes it extremely difficult to find a remedy for space-nausea. You're proud of space-sickness. It's the one factor that sets you off from other men, that makes you seem better, stronger, than they are. In the face of that psychological fix no remedy is likely to work if you know you are taking it."

He stared at her. Now he did not understand what she was saying even if there was truth of a sort in what she said. Spacemen were a proud and haughty breed. "What was the second reason?"

"The second reason?" She faltered. This was something she did not want to discuss. "We—we had tested them on animals, and they seemed to work sometimes but we couldn't be sure about them and about the effect they would have on human beings, until we had tested them in the no-gravity zone itself. So I was the guinea pig who came out here to test them."

"You were?" His voice rocked through the room. "And if they didn't work what might have happened to you?"

"Nobody knows for sure but some of the animals died."

"Lord in heaven, girl, you took a chance like that, you came out here to test a new kind of medicine that might work, and might kill?"

"There was no other way."

It was a test a spaceman could understand, a test a spaceman might run.

But this girl had had the courage to do it too. He saw now what he had not seen before, that spacemen were no special breed of men, that they were just part of the human race. Where they went, in haughty pride and disdainful of all lesser creatures, others could go too. Others, like this girl here . . .

This was the real miracle.

He moved to the port and stood looking out. The Big Man Ocean itself out there, a mighty space barrier shutting off the human race from—whatever was out there.

In this moment the barrier had begun to come down. Instead of a wall, space had become a highway leading to the far-off stars. A feeling of triumph rose in him. Men would go this way now, borne on the broad back of the Big Man Ocean itself, because of this girl.

Beside him her voice was a whisper. "You are not angry with me for not telling you sooner?"

"I am very proud of you," he an-

swered. It was as great a compliment as he could pay. He mused for a moment on some problem, spoke softly. "You could be the first space-woman. With those pills of yours you can go to space. No woman has ever been able to do it until now. Do you want to try?"

"Do you mean that?" she whispered.

"I never meant anything more," he answered. "Do you want to try?"

He saw her nod. The feeling of triumph in him rose up, up, up. The men of space could have partners now, they could have with them their ancient helper, the helpmeet who had followed with them along all the paths their feet had trod. Now the ancient and eternal partnership was again complete, now the race took another step along its unending journey to the stars.

Eric the Gaunt, following a pattern as old as the human race, put a long arm around this girl who had come to space. And she, repeating her part in that pattern, came closer willingly.



ooo

oh-oh, Dry Scalp!

"HE'S GOT LADDIE BOY in check all right, but not Dry Scalp. My, what unkempt hair! Looks like a mane . . . and I'll bet it's as hard to comb. Loose dandruff, too. He needs 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic!"



*Hair looks better..
scalp feels better..
when you check Dry Scalp*

IT'S GREAT! Try it! See what a big difference 'Vaseline' Hair Tonic makes in the good looks of your hair. Just a few drops daily check loose dandruff and those other annoying signs of Dry Scalp . . . spruce up your hair quickly and effectively. Contains no alcohol or other drying ingredients.

Vaseline HAIR TONIC
TRADE MARK ®

Listen to DR. CHRISTIAN,
starring JEAN HERSHOLT,
on CBS Wednesday nights.

MILORDS METHUSELAH

A Novelet by CARTER SPRAGUE



Hayes and Jacobs could see the
Tellus II rising upward into the
heavens

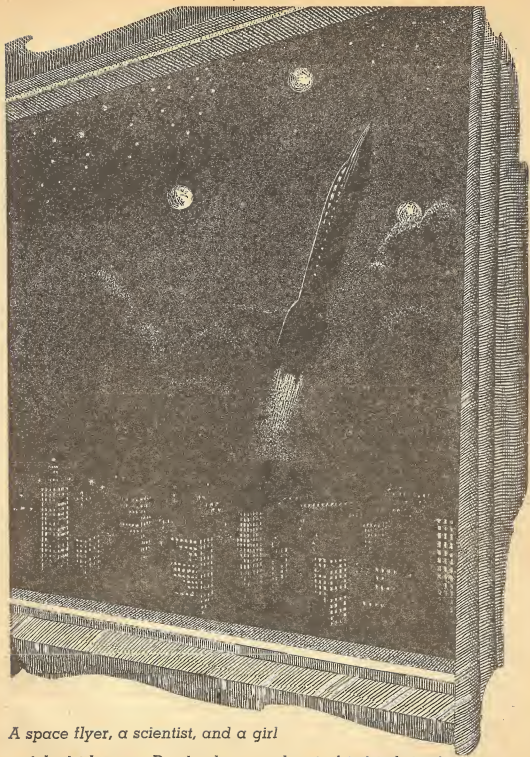
CHAPTER I

Premiere

MICHAEL HAYES listened to Margrita's limpid tones and pushed his chair back from the chessboard with relief. As usual, Smith Jacobs was peel-

ing away his tactical hide and after nine long years it was getting more than tiresome.

"Where's Liza?" he asked with a trace



*A space flyer, a scientist, and a girl
sociologist become Demigods on a planet of twisted time!*

of irritation. "After all, this is her show. She ought to be ready."

"I believe the *Mademoiselle* Farren is still having her hair prepared," said Magrita politely. "The Grand Leader Mai-Grep is waiting below with his Lady. Perhaps the *Monsieurs* Hayes and—"

"Magrita!" said Michael sternly, his eyes dining on the slim brown opulence of her translucently-gowned young figure, then enjoying dessert on the soft luminosity of her features. "Magrita, I love your looks, I love your accent. For all I know I may even love you. But it is not *monsieurs* in the plural, it is *mes-sieurs*—and neither Smitty here nor I qualify anyway."

"My!" exclaimed a new feminine voice from the arched satin-hung doorway at the other end of the long room. "Aren't we up on our antique cultures, Michael? I hope you alleged gentlemen are ready. I'm not a girl who likes to be kept waiting."

She swept down on them over the deep-pile carpet, magnificent in char- treuse satin and a fabulous midnight-fur stole, with her blue-black hair up-swept to give full regality to the long ivory column of her neck, the peristyle of her jawline. Michael stifled the impulse to tell her that she was not a girl—not anymore—if she had ever been one.

"Let's go, Mike," said Smith Jacobs, rising and stuffing his pipe into a side pocket of his anachronistic twentieth-century white-tie-and-tails. The pipe put a sag in his perfectly cut pleated trousers, making him look more than ever like a sad hound dog who had somehow fallen into his clothes while trapped in a locked closet.

Mike took Liza's proffered arm, noting that some of the white on the deltoid-length kid glove rubbed off on his sleeve. He felt like a fool in this ancient light blue flier's dress-uniform, with all of its buttons and absurd medals. Smitty moved up on her other side and Magrita fell in behind them, along with that

lounge lizard Lexis Toay, who had followed Liza into the room.

He wondered if Lexis had helped Liza arrange her coiffure—certainly something had been up and doing between them for some little time. Though it was still hard to think of time logically on Planus, with its four-hour "days," its sixty-four-hour "months" and its one-month "years." For the moment Michael felt lost.

THERE was for him something basically irksome about attaining a god-head of sorts out of what had seemed to be endless fiasco. If only these dam-fool Planians had had some sort of a landing field ready when he had put down the *Tellus* where the spaceport was marked on his map, almost ten long Earth years ago. Of course the map was more than a thousand Earth years old but none the less . . .

He got himself under control as Liza jabbed a sharp elbow into his short ribs. He managed a smile and mumbled words of greeting to the thick-set brown man, adrip with jewelled orders, who was waiting for them in the great foyer at the foot of the staircase. As usual the Grand Leader was obsequious to Liza, threatening to nibble the glove right off the hand she offered him.

He wondered why she didn't have him trained to kiss her foot—she certainly had revealed no other scruples in her experiment—then found himself being inexorably paired off with the Grand Leader's Lady—a bedizened beldame of sixty-seven. Which made her, he computed, almost seven years old by any Earth calendar.

They drove through the brightly-lit avenues of Nuevo Yorka in gleaming black-and-chromium four-wheeled monsters, which might have come out of an archeological museum of Earth rather than from the brand new assembly lines of Planus. For himself, if A-power were not available, Michael Hayes preferred a horse.

He caught a glimpse in the open car

ahead of Liza, bowing and smiling and waving her gloved arms to the roaring populace of brown-faced folk who threatened to burst the police-lines on either side of the broad boulevard. She was rapidly developing from a mere problem into something approaching a menace.

As he bowed and waved himself he considered Liza. Like himself she had been selected for youth as well as scien-

not unbrushed—she had had little time to be a woman. Mike, who was not unhandsome in his russet way and had been told so by a number of Triple-A honeycombs, considered her beneath notice.

It had, all in all, been a good thing the silver-blond Smith Jacobs had been assigned to fill up the complement. For Smitty, an older man of less volatile temperament, had played the rôle of

Would Longevity Make Us Happier?



THERE was a time, not so long ago biologically speaking, when man computed quite accurately that his life would be lifted to a higher plane if he could only supply himself and his family with a secure dry cave, plenty of raw meat and skins and have sufficient fuel handy to keep him warm in winter.

More recently the panaceas have come more frequently—ranging all the way from universal suffrage to the solar house. Yet, as each goal is attained and existence lifted to its new level, human problems have had a way of multiplying rather than the reverse. The more we have the more we must learn in order to manage it—and the less relative time we have to learn it in.

Hence healthy and functional longevity has become a most fashionable dream—one whose attainment is increasingly upon us. Yet if we do manage to extend our life-spans indefinitely, is it likely that we shall be any the happier for it? We wonder, since no matter what we have, no matter how long we succeed in enjoying it, we still remain human, exposed to the full battery of frustrations and miseries which we, of all species, seem most ingenious at inflicting upon ourselves.

In "Milords Methuselah," Mr. Sprague considers a trio of very human folk who, in an inverse way, are enabled to enjoy virtual immortality upon an all-too-mortal world. And we do not feel that "enjoy" is exactly the word which conveys their resultant states of mind and emotions.

—THE EDITOR.

tific brilliance when the Planus expedition was made up—it seemed almost the hundred and twenty-odd years ago it had been in Planian time.

Mike was then a hot young pilot-engineer, one of the first half dozen space pilots to master the intricacies of the rediscovered overdrive that enabled men once more to visit the stars through travel faster than light in the dead grey-ness of subspace.

Liza Farren had been a scraggly young thing despite her incredible health. Judged by her dress and her mannishly cut hair—more often than

balance wheel much of the way. For a moment Mike felt sorry for him—then he remembered the chess games and forgot about it.

He glanced at the twelve-story structure on their left as if he could see through, beyond and over it to where the *Tellus* still lifted its nose three hundred feet in the air on the reclaimed landing field south of Nuevo Yorka. But of course the building and hundreds, perhaps thousands more, beyond it blocked the view.

"Our people are so excited!" burred the Grand Leader's still-married dowa-

ger in his right ear. She spoke the language of Earth with an atrocious Planian accent—but her ego would have been bruised had he switched the conversation to Planian. Politely he murmured something to the effect that it was a great occasion.

But he still smarted when he thought of that landing. To take a fully-loaded star-ship like the *Tellus* into subspace, to bring her through within a scant ten thousand miles of her destination—a planet unvisited by Earth in a millenium—and then to bust her bottom on an outcropping of uncharted rock hidden under heavy vegetation—it still made him wince to think of it.

The *Tellus* was still there, her bow-antenna pointing up at the weak-tea lemon-colored ball that passed for a sun here on the long-lost planet. But her tubes were smashed, her A-power gutted in the crush-in, even her subspace communicator dead all these years for lack of A-power and the alloys to contain its radiations.

"Here we are!" burred the Grand Leader's Lady and Mike got busy playing the attentive expert. He was not really bad mannered in essence—he was suffering from a pile-up of frustrations. So he performed his duties with barely proper aplomb, his smile pasted neatly in place.

The incredibly rococo interior of the lobby they then entered almost staggered him. He shot a quick glance at Smitty, who blinked, then turned away to hide a faint smile. It was the most ghastly piece of architecture Mike had ever seen, dripping gold in meaningless carvings and festoons and archaic chandeliers.

HIS homesickness increased. This, he thought, was carrying Liza's twentieth-century fetish a trifle too far. Granted, she had seized upon this unexampled opportunity to recreate Earth's pre-atomic age on Planus—but she needn't have selected its worst aspects. Becoming a demigoddess had in-

creased her perversity.

On Earth large places of entertainment had ceased to exist even before the thousand-year horror that followed the disastrous interplanetary wars in the twenty-third century. Even in the long retrogression that followed humanity had been glad to be rid of such mass gatherings. They had been too vulnerable and then there were the teleo and the tridem receivers.

The Grand Leader's party was ushered with unction to a flag-draped gilt box in the center of what seemed to be a mezzanine. The full-dress audience rose and cheered them after the Planian anthem was played by a three-hundred-piece orchestra.

And then, to Mike's amazement, he found himself looking at giant crudely-colored pictures that flickered across a mammoth screen to the accompaniment of an uneven sound track. He had heard of "movies" of course—but this was the first he had seen—or heard.

"Good heavens!" Smitty muttered, leaning forward to speak in his ear as the movie proceeded. "They've got it all wrong."

Mike merely nodded. Liza was giving Smitty one of her patented glares for talking during the picture and Mike didn't wish to collect one on his own. After all, this whole shebang, like the entire culture that surrounded them, was Liza's show. It might not be art or even civilization but it rated some sort of a nod.

Furthermore, as the primitive entertainment progressed, Mike found himself getting interested against his will. It had a sort of power and speed and suspense that a spaceman could understand—even a spaceman who had been grounded for ten long years.

He found himself sitting tensely as black-skinned burnoosed cowboys rode fiery Arab steeds across vast stretches of desert to rescue the stolen sacred cows from the turbaned Indians who had stolen them. And the temple dancer, adrip with gold coins, who rescued the

trapped hero at the cost of her own hitherto worthless life—she was not half bad, he felt, even blown up to giant size. She reminded him a little of Magrita at times.

When it was over Liza listened to the applause, smiled white-toothed radiance in return and then turned to the rest of them in the Grand Leader's box. She said, "How do you like our first Western?"

"Believe it or not," Mike told her when he could get a word in by working awhile at one corner of it, "I enjoyed it. You've really got things humming, Liza, honeycomb. And that twentieth century must have—"

She put the freeze on him ostentatiously and he realized he had forgotten her dislike of being addressed familiarly in public—or in private either as far as he was concerned. He wondered what that wart Lexis Toay called her when they were alone together.

He was glad when he was back in their own quarters—the incredibly luxurious anachronism called the Earth Palace, which Mike liked to annoy Liza by calling the Waldorf. It had been reared to Liza's specifications as one of the first moves of her twentieth-century experiment more than eight Earth years earlier.

His uniform collar had left a red line around his neck, he discovered when he took it off and handed it to the waiting Magrita. He exhaled and lit himself a cylinder of paper-wrapped *mutorse* weed, which passed on Planus for a cigarette. He longed then for just a whiff of good old Earth tobacco.

But later, when Magrita lay close in his arms and he relaxed in the satin softness of his immense couch, he decided that if he had to be grounded anywhere Planus was the place for it. It wasn't entirely unpleasant to be only thirty-three Earth years old and a very up-and-coming demigod.

"Did you say something, Earth-one?" the girl inquired sleepily, half opening her immense dark eyes.

"Nothing important, baby," he told her gently. "Just that life has its little compensations."

CHAPTER II

A-Pile on Planus

SMITTY woke him up early via the wired archaism that was called a telephone. He wanted, he said, to have breakfast with Mike. Mike agreed and showered and got into the spun-glass unigar which was one of the garments he had brought from Earth. It was virtually impossible to wear it out in an Earth lifetime.

Magrita, of course, had long since had her fill of sleep and arisen and gone about whatever her business was for the day—or the two hours of daylight that passed for a day here on Planus. There were the other girls in their chambers, summonable by the phone in a matter of seconds, but Mike was for the time sticking pretty much with Magrita. She had after all such a pitifully brief while.

"Praise the ancient Gods of Babylon!" he said when he entered the Earth scientist's dining room and saw the breakfast waiting under its globular silver covers. "No chessboard for once."

"Not this time," said Smitty with his faint smile. He led the way to the table, adding, "We'll serve ourselves if you don't mind. I think it's time we talked together—alone."

"Good heavens, Smitty—getting nervous?" Mike mocked him.

"No—just careful," the anthro-linguist replied. He lifted a *breal* chop from one of the platters to his plate, added two slices of toast and pulled his cup of Planian *stoffee* closer.

"That fool movie or whatever it was upset you?" Mike asked.

"A little, perhaps—that and other things," said the older man, talking quietly after he had swallowed. Then,

"Mike, how much do you know about the twentieth century back on Earth?"

"Not too much," Mike confessed. "I've learned more about it here on Planus than I ever picked up back in school. Liza certainly has a crush on the period—she's crammed full of it."

"She's not entirely sound," said Smitty quietly. "I have not felt free to speak about it since her teachers and mine are of different schools of opinion concerning the period. And who knows which is right? I have been content to observe and study—until now."

"It's all Greek to me," said Mike, talking while he chewed. "Hey, this new chef of yours is something! Wish mine were as good."

"First, Mike," said Smitty gently but firmly, "I want to tell you something about the twentieth century. To you, like most people of our era, it was a time when man burst from his pre-atomic shackles and first reached for the stars. An age of great adventures, of great spiritual leaders like Gandhi, of all the seed beginnings of the great civilization of Earth today."

"Okay, Smitty," said Mike, nibbling toast. "I agree. Okay?"

"Okay—as far as it goes. It was the most romantic century in known history," Smith Jacobs went on, frowning slightly. "But it was also the century in which were sown all the dragon seeds of the terrible atomic wars that ripped our Solar and budding interstellar civilization apart three centuries later. It was a century of wars, or cruelty, of men like Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin."

"Sure—but there aren't any of *them* around here," said Mike reassuringly. "If there were we'd have known about them before this. Besides, *this* twentieth century isn't real—it's Liza's toy."

The old man sighed and finished his coffee, mopped his lips with a crisp heavy damask napkin. He said, "Perhaps it is Liza's toy—to Liza—but is it a toy to *them*? I think not."

"But we've only been here ten years—in fact less than . . ." Mike's voice

faded out as he realized the absurdity of his statement. For a moment his mind ranged back over the incredible conditions which had greeted them when they crash landed on Planus.

At first they had been met as aliens to be feared. Memory of the parent planet of Earth had faded to mere legend—and this in a comparatively brief thousand years. It had for some time been a source of baffling puzzlement to all three of them.

Upon emerging from the tail-battered *Tellus* they had been politely but firmly taken into custody, had been examined and queried and chivvied and harried for months on end. Finally, with the aid of maps brought from Earth, long-forgotten relics and records had been dug up and their status as Earth visitors established.

"How could they have forgotten so completely?" was the question that had puzzled the Earthmen most. For when the starships took off from Planus to return to the Solar System in a vain effort to put an end to the struggle then threatening to dismember a universe, Planus had been a well established planet colony, complete with twenty-fourth century gadgetry and an alert educated population of something more than seven and a half millions.

Left to itself Planus had gone through a Dark Age to match anything in the history of the parent planet. But by the time the *Tellus* sat down too hard on the rock in the old spaceport it had pulled up creditably on its own, was at a level approximating that of late eighteenth-century Earth in science and culture.

So, the visitors wondered, why had the Earth origin lapsed so sadly into the mists of the forgotten. It was a poser until one day Liza voiced a question that had bothered all subconsciously. She had wondered what happened to the people who questioned them. They seemed to come and go in relays every few weeks.

It was Smitty who had come up with

the answer to both questions. And the answer lay in a metabolism that had become incredibly speeded up in the course of a thousand years. At a distance from its comparatively cool sun of a mere eleven million miles Planus completed its entire orbit in a scant thirty-two days.

"On Earth we have had about thirty-five generations since the star routes were abandoned," said the older scientist. "Here, by rough calculations, I think it must be closer to three hundred. For their lives have become attuned to the planet. They live a full year in what seems to us barely a month. We meet them in relays—because they die or become senile. We simply outlive them."

AND so it had turned out. And soon the people and officials of Planus became accustomed to the presence of the trio from the parent planet. Then, when they continued to survive the year-months without weakening or other signs of decay, they had become to the natives a little more than human. Today they were demigods, able to unite a planet under one rule, to develop and dominate its culture and science and social life—even at Liza Farren's whim.

Now, across the breakfast table, Smitty said, "No, it is not a toy to them. Nor will it be for us if things are going as I fear they may be. For the twentieth century was a time of terror."

"But why should they pick on us?" Mike inquired, scowling. "After all, we've helped them come a long way."

"Because we have the one thing men want most, Mike." The older man's tone was deadly serious. "To them we are immortal."

"Even so," said Mike. "What in hell can they do about it?"

The scientist rose and walked to a wide window, which overlooked a magnificent garden behind the palace ground. Without looking around he said, "Mike, remember that it was in the twentieth century man discovered how to unleash the power of the atom."

"You mean they're picking up the knowhow to—" began Mike. "But even with speeded-up metabolism I don't see how they—"

"They manage to cram an incredible amount into the brief years of their lives," said the older man. "Perhaps not as much as we can in our longer spans but a lot more proportionately. And remember, they have one thing in their favor which Earth did not—they have us."

Mike was shocked. "But I thought the three of us agreed not to put A-power into their hands until we decided they were advanced enough. After all, Liza's twentieth-century experiment is merely a stop-gap. She only wanted a chance to see what it was really like."

Mike paused as an horrendous thought struck him. "Say, Smitty, Liza's been acting pretty much on her own of late. You don't suppose that she has given them the secret?"

The scientist sighed and shook his head as he stuffed his pipe full of noxious *mutorse* shag. "Not directly," he said. "But remember, when man reached his twentieth-century state of development, he discovered the ways of atom shattering on his own—and all but blew himself to kingdom come."

"You think that will happen here?" Mike asked anxiously. He had read enough history to know what atomic war could mean.

"I doubt it," Smitty replied. "These people are united and they have a purpose—comparative immortality. I have a hunch that if they can master star travel they'll make a try for some other planet whose metabolism is slower—perhaps even Earth."

"But with their short life spans, Smitty," said Mike, "they won't live to make the journey—even if they master subspace."

"They won't live to make it," Smith Jacobs replied. "But their children will. Think, man—it takes them less than one and a half years to reach child-bearing age—Earth years, I mean. And

think of an aggressive people—twentieth-century people—on Earth or some other settled planet, determined to have progeny until their original life span is restored. They'd overrun it."

Mike shook his head and tried a cigarette. This was not the sort of problem he found easy. Mike liked to solve knotty posers of space-time or astral navigation. He had a way with incredibly complex A-machinery. Problems in the abstract were rough on his practical nature. Yet he respected Smitty's concern.

"Then," he began, "Liza seems to have got us into a—"

"Into a what?" said Liza, entering the room through an open doorway. "Pardon my eavesdropping but one of my little friends told me you two were discussing me and I couldn't bear to be left out. Now, my fine unfeathered friends, what in hell is this all about?"

In a brief white bolero shirt and slashed culottes and unslippers of cloth of gold she was a dashing handsome figure. Her dark hair hung to her shoulders, controlled by a fillet, also of gold. Her creamy skin seemed barely to cover the curves of her magnificently mature figure. Mike wondered how or why he had ever thought her a scraggly type. If only she weren't so—arrogant.

He said, "Smitty's afraid this twentieth-century bug of yours has the natives ready to go aggressive. He seems to think they're on the way to getting control of A-power."

"Smitty's an old lady," said Liza scornfully, flinging the scientist a glance of contempt. "For heaven's sake, Smitty, don't let your old-wife fears run away with you. You know as well as I do these people are only a few decades up from barbarism."

"Perhaps—and perhaps that adds to the danger," said the scientist quietly. He fished for a match to relight his pipe.

"Danger! What danger?" Liza asked angrily. "If any A-experimenting were going on I'd be the first to know about it. After all, I've been the guiding figure in this whole civilization."

"Come with me," said Smitty once his pipe was going. "Both of you. I have something to show you that may be of interest."

He led them through an inner chamber to a heavy metal door in a far wall. Leaning, he murmured something into a tiny orifice in its center—one of the voice-locks so familiar back on Earth. The door slid silently open to reveal a windowless room.

"So *this* is your laboratory," said Liza, inspecting it. "Smitty, I had no idea you had this here."

"You see—there are some things even you do not know," the scientist replied with a detachment which saved it from insult. As they crossed the threshold the upper walls lit up to shed soft clear light on the complex devices within the room. Smitty led them past a series of tables and other installations to a small box that rested on a telescopic stand against the far wall.

"I believe you both know what this is," he said. "I had it brought from the *Tellus* some five years ago."

It was, of course, a mesocounter, a self-energizing instrument capable of picking up atomic radiations and revealing their character on a series of dials at a distance of 10,000 miles.

And as they looked the small red light near its top glowed and faded, glowed and faded. By this and by the numerals and symbols beneath they knew at once an atomic pile was working nearby.

CHAPTER III

Fruitless Journey

WHEN Mike got back to his own chambers it was daylight again and Magrita was waiting for him, nibbling daintily on a hot dog and licking the mustard from her fingers with her pretty pink tongue. Her lipstick—another of Liza's twentieth-century at-

mospheric touches—was smeared ever so slightly.

"*Monsieur Mike!*" she said. She made a motion to embrace him, saw her mustard-and lickstick disarray in a wall mirror and moved quickly and lithely to make emergency repairs. Her scarlet bobby sox provided bright harmony to the light brown of her legs.

"Just call me 'Your Ultra-Magnificent Highness' for short," said Mike. Magrita laughed and made a face at him and moved into his arms, demanding a kiss and getting it—a long one.

"Okay—for now," he said, gently removing her embrace and essaying a stern frown which, he discovered, was marred by a bit of lipstick smear derived from her kiss. She pouted prettily, then got busy with a handkerchief, cleaning it up.

"Do me a favor, Maggi," he told her, sinking into an immense arm chair stuffed with *kurnick* down lighter than any of the nylon cushions of Earth. Magrita promptly perched on the arm and slid into his lap like a penguin. He let her stay.

"Of course, Your Ultra Whatever-it-is—if I can," she murmured.

"Something," he told her, "is cooking." Then, at her frown of incomprehension. "Something new has been added—somebody here on Planus is up to something us godfolk ought to know about." He gave her a piercing look and was not fooling—the three-headed session with Liza and Smitty from which he had come had been a rugged one.

She turned a little pale under her brown skin and he could feel her muscles tense, then relax too much. She looked at him with bland innocence as if she did not understand.

"Maggi," he told her, "you can't fool me. Remember, I've been around a long, long time—a good many of your lifetimes. And all I have to do is press that button on the wall and I'll never see you again—nor you me. Perhaps I'd be doing you a favor."

"Oh, no, Mike!" she cried and her

head was hot against his chest and the sweet young scent of her pervading him. "I'd die, Mike, I'd *die* if you sent me away! But . . ." She lifted her head, revealing tear stains on her cheeks and bit her full lower lip.

"But what?" he prodded remorselessly. He felt like a triple-plated sea-hell but her refusal had caught him off-guard.

"But I don't *know* anything—define," she murmured as if afraid the walls had ears. "All I know is that it's very secret. There have been rumors—gossip—you know. One of the girls had a friend in the Grand Leader's personal guard and he told her there was a big secret project on in the Zantroul Forest."

"Did you say she *had* a friend?" Mike inquired curiously.

Magrita nodded and buried her face in his chest again. She said in muffled tones, "She hasn't any more—not him. One of the footmen overheard and he didn't keep a date with her that night—and he hasn't been seen or heard of since. She's frantic."

That tied in with Smitty's suspicions, Mike thought. It was the first time these short-spanned abandoned colonists of Earth had had the temerity to try to hide anything from the three of them. It could easily—probably did—mean their position on Planus was becoming precarious. It was Mike's turn to bite his lower lip.

"Listen, honeycomb," he said more gently. "You must have some idea of what this forest project is about."

"I couldn't understand it—neither could she," said the girl, her lovely face knotted with unaccustomed concentration as she sought to remember her friend's exact words. She added, "I think it was something about a very big building—I *think* it was, Mike." She made a move to slide off his lap. "I'll bring her here if you want and you can question her yourself. You might like her. She's very pretty."

He held the girl close. He had hurt

her enough and after all he was not god but mere man. He kissed her and told her to forget it for the moment. Then, as her face cleared and her arms went around his neck, he frowned and muttered, "Building—of course there'd be a building. Probably a whole lot of them."

"No—building was not the word," said Magrita, visibly thinking hard again. "But it was something that meant building."

"You're making it tougher, honey-comb," he replied. "Something like—house, structure, edifice— Cut off my wings and call me ground hog." He almost shook her. "Did he say '*pile*'?"

She nodded happily and cuddled against him—but Mike was in a desultory mood where lovemaking was concerned by that time. Of course it merely confirmed Smitty's mesocounter. He still found it hard to believe that the Planians were taking this vital step in secret. But there seemed to be no denying it.

An hour later, when darkness had again fallen, Mike and Smitty sallied forth together in one of the Palace jeeps—another absurd but practically twentieth-century anachronism. Of course a limousine full of plain-clothes guards followed them through the streets but that was only courtesy protection—or was it?

Neither of them was sure of anything any more. But though each knew what the other was thinking no comment was made as they moved swiftly through the tree-lined avenues with their oddly assorted architectural specimens on either side — Swedish "modern," half-timbered-Tudor, pseudo-Norman-French, Taj Mahal, Angkor Vat and skyscraper American. White toped traffic policemen, wearing primitive Air-Force uniforms, waved them through traffic with white gloves. Above the three moons of Planus shone like beauty patches.

THEY were detoured once—around a huge All-Faith temple in which Liza

was attending a festival. The temple itself was an incredible structure covering one entire end of a large square or plaza.

Its facade was gilded—an immense figure with the six arms of Jain, the belly and legs of Buddha, the face of Christ and a headgear that looked like a Byzantine dome on the old Kremlin. Floodlights played on it steadily and on the vast swarm of folk who were crowding through the great doors in its big toes to attend the services. It was an astonishing structure.

"Trust Liza to cook that up," said Mike, shaking his head.

"Don't sneer at all her ideas," said Smitty, puffing in vain on his pipe. "She has done a tremendous thing in bringing all of Planus together in a single faith—no matter how garbled it is."

"Maybe you're right," said the younger man, cutting to the left through a lane in the crowd. "Just the same I think she's taking this goddess business a trifle too seriously."

"And *you* aren't—with your succession of temple concubines?"

Mike made no answer—he had none to make. After all, it was his early behavior in this regard that had broken things up between Liza and himself. But she had been so unattractive then and he had been bored and frustrated and the girls had simply been thrown his way. How was he to know Liza was going to turn out looking like a Botticelli courtesan or one of the twentieth-century Conover models she seemed to like to imitate?

Silence between them was strained until they reached the landing field south of the city, where the tallest structure was still the *Tellus*, poised as if forever on her shattered tail. A closed gate and a pair of uniformed guards blocked their progress.

"Dammit man, don't you know us?" snapped Mike irritably.

"Yes, Milord," said the larger of the

guards. He pressed a button by the gate which brought an under-officer on the trot. The latter took in the situation at a glance and quickly ordered the gate open. The jeep went on through, the palace limousine still trailing it.

Slowly, minutes later, the two Earthmen rose on the long escalator ramp which led to the port in the *Tellus*. Although the starship's A-power had died with her crash via the automatic extinguishers, Mike had rigged a dynamo to give her static functional electric power when they decided to open the big ship to the Planians some four Earth-years earlier.

The younger man felt a touch of homesickness as he stood in the round central cabin, its floor always underfoot thanks to its gyroscopic arrangement, no matter at what angle the ship itself was tilted. It looked strangely bare and lonely without the books on the shelves of the plastic wall cabinets, without any evidence of ever having been lived in.

Gaunt pale-green walls, gaunt pale-green ceiling, gaunt composition floor, gaunt bare couches and food cabinets, empty water cooler. It looked stripped, naked, dead—as indeed it was. Mike repressed a shudder, pushed a button that made the composition floor transparent, permitting a view into the A-machinery below.

From above it looked all right—but a glimpse into its lower bowels through the engineer's wall periscope screens would, Mike knew, tell another story—a story of hopelessly twisted tubes, of blasted innards, of rock-crushed anti-radiation sheathing.

Automatically, however, he pushed another button and bent to look through the wall periscope screen to his left. And froze. "Smitty," he said, his voice unsteady. "*Smitty—come here—look!*"

The lower machinery was gone. The *Tellus* had been as cleanly eviscerated as the corpse she was. He glanced at Smitty, who was staring through the

screen, then turned on the one on the other side of the cabin. The story, as he had known it would be, was the same. The two Earthmen stared at one another grimly.

"It was those damned books!" said Mike. "I told Liza they weren't ready for all of them. But she went into her usual song and dance. Smitty, this looks like a class-one foul-up."

"I'm not too surprised," said the older man, knocking ashes from his pipe bowl into his palm, seeking an ashtray in vain, finally moving to the open port and tossing them outside. "Mike—I think we'd better make a try at inspecting Zantroul Forest."

"What do you mean—try?" Mike countered, his eyes thoughtful.

"We'll find out—unless I'm very much mistaken."

As usual Smitty was right. They had little trouble finding the brand new metal-paved auto-road into the dark mass of the forest. But again they were stopped by gates and guards—and by a heavy wire mesh fence labeled at regular intervals—ELECTRIFIED.

They went back to the city and the Palace—and found Liza and Lexis Toay awaiting them in Smitty's drawing room. They were sipping sparkling *Xoquar* from crystal glasses and as usual the sight of these two sleek creatures together made Mike see red.

He said, "Lexis, what's the idea of barring our entrance to the A-plant in Zantroul Forest? What's the idea of the secrecy?"

"A pair of gods like you should have been able to teleport yourselves," said the too-handsome Planian with an unpleasant smile that lifted Mike's hackles. "Surely material things. . ."

"It's not in accord with our agreement," said Smitty more quietly. But Mike, knowing the man as he did, could tell that Smitty too was boiling. Lexis put his sleek head back and laughed.

"And we poor Planians have been taught to think of you as something

more than mortal," said he. "You've lived like gods at our expense but you aren't gods—except for your life spans. And that, I know now, is an accident of the universe, not of heaven."

"Liza," said Mike, catching a look of fear in her dark eyes and swinging upon her, "Liza, did you tell this..."

"Yes, I did," she said defiantly. "A long time ago."

Mike looked his contempt—for this was the one vital secret they had vowed to keep to themselves at all costs. The Planians could have suspected—but they could never have known without visiting Earth unless someone talked. He turned on his heel to go to his own apartment.

"By the way, Mike," said Lexis with annoying familiarity, "you'll have to change your partner tonight, I'm afraid. Magrita is—indisposed. Perhaps permanently. Sorry, old man."

There was no mistaking his meaning. Mike left them, seething, before he made their dilemma worse through violence.

CHAPTER IV

Dr. Lantrec

SMITTY followed him almost at once, found Mike standing in the center of his dressing room carpet, clenching and unclenching his fists. The older man laid a steadying hand on his shoulder.

"It's bad, Mike—very bad. But it's up to us to make it better, not worse. Come, man, use the wits you were born with."

Mike shook himself clear, said in a low trembling tone, "By what right did she betray us, Smitty? And by what right did she let that skunk Lexis do whatever he's had done to Magrita?"

"I think Liza's beginning to think,"

said Smitty soberly. "There was a look in your eyes when you walked out, Mike. . . ."

"What right had she not to think?" cried the younger man.

"I suppose," Smitty replied quietly, "that *you're* thinking now. I suppose you have planned exactly what you're going to do."

Mike sagged as the words sank home. He turned to the older man, searching his face, said, "Smitty—what *can* we do about it?"

"About this A mess?" Smitty countered. "Or about Magrita?"

"Why—about . . ." Mike began, then his voice faded. He looked sick, even frightened. "I suppose the A business must come first, Smitty. But dammit, I love that kid. I can't just let her be taken away and imprisoned—maybe tortured or killed for all I know."

"Of course not," said Smitty, relief in his pale blue eyes. "But let's try to do what we can and hope for the best."

"All right," said Mike without the ghost of a grin. "What *can* we do? I asked you before and you haven't answered me, Smitty."

"We can pay a visit to Win Lantec," Smitty told Mike. "He's bound to know what's going on. He's the greatest all-around mind these people have produced since we came here."

Mike saw the pale yellow Planian dawn lighting the sky above the towers on the other side of the Palace Garden. "Come on then," he said, striding toward the suite elevator. "Let's go."

They were not prevented from reaching the trim little white frame house west of Nuevo Yorka, where the greatest scientist of Planus made his abode with a niece to keep house for him. Beyond the slim *M'raynian* trees that lined up like soldiers behind his dwelling the pseudo-Gothic spires of one of the great universities of Planus were partially lit by the still-rising sun of the lost planet.

The brown-faced man with the halo of white hair who met them with a smile of welcome looked so old, so wise, that

it was almost impossible for Mike to realize that his age, in terms of Earth, was approximately five and three quarters.

"I have been expecting you," he told them simply. "I am glad you are here. As a Planian I could not come to you." He led them inside to a homely cluttered comfortable living room and called for his niece, a plump middle-aged lady with a high voice, to get coffee for their visitors. In Win Lantrec's hand was a clarinet.

"How goes your music?" Mike asked, aware of the aged scientist's fondness for the old-fashioned instrument.

His face lit up and he played the first few bars of a chorus of *Muskrat Ramble*, an ancient jazz classic of the early and middle twentieth century. Then he removed the instrument, said, "I fear I shall never become another Arty Goodman or Benny Shaw but I derive great delight even from playing it poorly."

"Which you don't," said Smitty, nodding his approval.

The old man beamed on them, lighting the room with the radiance of his smile. "Thank you, thank you, Smith Jacobs. And you too, for bearing with me, Michael Hayes. But, gentlemen, you did not come here to discuss my poor talents on the clarinet."

"No. Doctor," said Smitty. "We came to ask you why we have not been permitted to know about the Zantroul Forest A-project."

PROFESSOR LANTREC closed his eyes for a long moment, spoke at last without opening them. Talking seemed very difficult for him.

"I feel perhaps," he began hesitantly, "that all of this is my fault. For it was I, in my poor pride, who first considered it possible to master the complex secrets of what you call nuclear physics. Actually it was my plan and hope to do much good for Planus. Now I fear for the results of my poor achievements."

"Then you have a pile working?" Smitty inquired with what for him was

sharpness. "What do you plan to do with it?"

"A pile has been working for almost three years now, Smith Jacobs," Dr. Lantrec told them. "But as to what I plan to do with it—I plan to do nothing with it. It has been taken out of my hands, gentlemen—the work of a lifetime taken and corrupted."

"I wouldn't blame them too harshly," said Smitty. Mike, who had been on the verge of asking the professor who the ringleaders were, was surprised to hear his colleague add, "I presume that your Grand Leader is the nominal head, with Lexis Toay the moving spirit."

"You are right, naturally," Dr. Lantrec informed him. "But there are many others—hundreds, perhaps thousands, in the plot. In time, perhaps, all of Planus will be mad for your immortality."

"I am afraid your people will meet with disfavor—perhaps even open hostility—on other worlds in time unless their presence has been prepared for," Smitty said thoughtfully. "And its ultimate effect on Planus at this stage of development might mean an era of post-atomic horror such as our Solar System once knew."

"I fear it is too late to stop them," said the aged man. "I know—I have tried—and failed." His head bowed with shame.

"Perhaps it isn't—yet," said Smitty. "Surely your people have not disowned you entirely. They can't have."

"Not *my* people—no. Not the people of Planus as a whole," said Dr. Lantrec. "But those who would have the advantage of your life span to amass power for themselves are in control." He glanced at Smitty curiously. "You have some purpose in mind, Jacobs?"

"I do," Smitty replied, "but it requires two things for success—a certain amount of time and access to the Zantroulian pile."

"I might gain you some small amount of time," the professor told them sadly. "Though time is fast growing short,

thanks to the natural impatience of the men involved. But the other—I fear not. I am only allowed to visit the pile under heavy guard.”

“I presume these boys have a spaceship ready,” Mike cut in impatiently. “Though how they plan to master the overdrive I don’t know. They’ll need me, I suppose.”

“They plan to have you with them,” said Dr. Lantrec simply. “That is one of the features of this cabal I like the least. To this purpose they have placed you—er—young lady aboard her.”

“What!” shouted Mike, leaping to his feet. “Then what are we waiting for, Smitty? Professor, where is this ship?”

“In Zantroul Forest, not far from the old spaceport,” the aged scientist replied quietly. “But you cannot reach it until they have decided the time is ripe. They count on your—er—lady’s presence aboard to prevent you from misguiding the *Tellus Two*.”

Mike was afloat with cold anger as they drove back to the city after taking hasty leave of Dr. Lantrec. It was all too evident that things were drawing close to deadline.

And, as Smitty pointed out, the entire scheme was futile.

These recreated twentieth-century men, with the exception of a handful of savants of Dr. Lantrec’s stature, were utterly unable to admit the truth of the immortality of Earthlings. To them it was some scientific magic which could lengthen a man’s life indefinitely—could remove the likelihood of early death as if it were an allergy.

They had no conception of the Earth centuries it would take to slow down their metabolism.

“And in the meanwhile,” Smitty pointed out, “they will breed like rabbits, thus destroying the carefully maintained balance of population on Earth and the rest of the peaceful Solar planets man has made habitable. Aggressive twentieth-century men and women will use our scientific genius to drive humanity into a new Dark Age.”

THEY drove back in less time than they had taken to reach Dr. Lantrec’s house, this despite heavier traffic of mid-morning on the highways that led into Nuevo Yorka. When they reached Mike’s chambers they found a nervous Liza awaiting them.

She listened to their accusations in unaccustomed silence, then burst out with, “But, Mike, can’t you see—I’ve arranged a method for all of us to get back to Earth at last.”

“It won’t wash,” Mike told her. “You’ve laid a large egg, Liza. Let Smitty tell you how things are going to work out if your neat little, sweet little conspiracy is successful.”

Smitty told her—and she listened, her naturally white skin growing whiter as he told her what the probable outcome of such a journey would mean to the parent planet and its neighbors. Finally she buried her face in her hands.

“I’ve been a heel,” she said, lifting her head. Her expression was strained and miserable, her sincerity indubitable. She added, “I was shy as a girl—shy and unattractive—so I buried myself in science and pretended it didn’t matter. And, Mike, you made fun of me on the journey out here. I hated you for it.”

“But you made fun of my muscle-headedness,” Mike countered.

“I was only trying to cover up my own sense of inferiority,” Liza replied with a flash of returning spirit. “Then here I became a goddess, I became handsome, even beautiful perhaps. I do not let my mirror lie to me—after all its truth was unpleasant for too long.”

“You are very beautiful, Liza,” said Smitty gently.

“To what avail?” cried the wretched woman. “By that time Mike was behaving like—like King Solomon or something. Oh, I don’t suppose I had any right to blame him but I did.”

“I tried—years ago—to straighten things out between us,” Mike told her. “I still haven’t forgotten what you called me.”

“I didn’t mean it,” Liza said mourn-

fully. "But I—I was so jealous that I couldn't help it. You took what you wanted so easily while I could never bring myself to—"

"How do you know what I want?" Mike countered harshly.

Smitty intervened, as he had so many times in the past ten years, to restore the conversational car to the track. He said, "None of this is helping us to stop the flight of the *Tellus Two*. Liza, I must have a certain amount of radio-active material—I suppose they are using hydronium?"

She nodded then shook her head. "You haven't a chance," she told him. "I never saw anything so carefully guarded." She frowned. "Besides, what good will radioactives do you?"

"Come here with me," he told them, rising. "Since I no longer trust the walls hereabouts we'll have to do this in person again."

Once more he led them to the secret lead-and-steel-lined laboratory at the rear of his own palace suite. Once more he used the voice-lock for entry, led them to and past the ominously red flicker of the mesometer, pulled a tarpaulin off a complex set of dials, buttons and levers atop a massive boxlike metal mass. Mike's mouth fell open. "The astra-communicator!" he exclaimed. "Smitty, you had it brought here from the *Tellus*."

"Wrong," said Smitty with a faint smile of triumph. "*They* have that one. But years ago I decided that these Planians were moving ahead so rapidly it wouldn't be long before they developed atomics. So I had this built piecemeal, put it together myself—all but the core of Hydronium, which will make it work."

He paused, looked at Mike, then at Liza added: "There is only one course to take. We must speak with Earth."

NEXT ISSUE

I PSI a novelet by Carter Sprague

AND MANY OTHER STORIES

CHAPTER V

Take-off

ALTHOUGH the distance was only a few miles they used Liza's helicopter, taking off from the landing area on the palace roof. It was dark again and Mike managed to slip in unnoticed—he hoped—while the Earthwoman was exchanging cabalistic signs with the guards. He crouched low until they were well up into the sky.

"I don't like your doing this," Mike told her. "Your friend Lexis will like it less if you succeed."

"*Lexis!*" Liza's scorn rang sharp in her voice. Then, in smaller tones, "Mike, I've been acting like a prize booby, haven't I? I feel so ashamed. I've thought only of myself."

"You had a lifetime of hurt and an unexampled chance to even up for it," Mike told her gently. Now that he understood he was no longer angry. "You felt these things—you *had* to do them."

"Truly the wine of the Gods is a heady brew for mere mortals to drink," she said shakily. Then, as they came over the rim of the forest minutes later, "Mike, I'm putting down right beside the *Tellus Two* shed. You cover yourself with that rug back there."

"What if they come and grab me?" he countered. "I won't even have a chance to put up a fight."

"They won't, never fear," Liza told him grimly. "I have these lads in my pocket, Mike. If there's trouble I'll yell. That will give you a chance to get into action and get away."

"It's not a very—romantic position," said Mike. "You doing all the dirty work while I cower under that damned rug."

"When were you ever romantic where I was concerned?" She mocked him softly. She dipped the copter slightly as he made an involuntary move toward

her. "No, Mike—not now. Remember Magrita."

He uttered a soft but whole-hearted curse into the darkness outside. His emotions had been taking a heavy wringing-out since the premiere of Planus' first western movie. He felt suddenly spent and drained of nervous energy. He yawned.

"That's what I mean," mocked Liza. "Romance and Liza add up to a yawn with you, Mike."

"You're being unfair," he told her half angrily. She merely laughed and got busy with the controls to bring the copter down.

Mike looked out the window almost in disbelief. The precious Planians had built almost an exact replica of the great Arizona desert plant from which the first *Tellus* had been born, built it here in a cleared-out square mile or so of the Zantroul Forest.

He studied the buildings and their arrangement with only slightly rusty professional eyes. There was the huge hangar shed for the new starship, beyond the squat semi-subterranean plastic structures in which the pile was maintained.

There were the machine sheds, the hypertrac garages for hauling the huge ship to the launching spot on the rebuilt spaceport. In front rose the gleaming stainless stellac gridwork of the cantilever launching tower, mounted on an immense movable platform.

In some ways, he thought, the Planians had improved upon the Arizona plant. The portable launching tower, for instance—he was about to say something about it to Liza when he saw that the treetops were coming close and she gestured toward the rear of the copter cabin. He hesitated, then got back and crept under the rug. It was not flattering to his ego but too much was at stake to do otherwise.

It was a long wait once the copter came down on its runners and Liza opened the door to step out. He heard her exchange some words in a low voice

with a pair of men, apparently guards. Then her footsteps faded on the gravelled surface beneath them.

He heard the guards muttering between themselves, caught snatches of conversation, such as, "... still think she's more than mortal but then I'm no scientist myself." He felt a trickle of sweat form in the small of his back beneath his clothing. It itched unbearably as it made its way downward along his spine.

But he lay still, lay still even when a desire to sneeze all but burst his nostrils. Some sort of dust in the blanket that covered him, he supposed. Time moved by inexorably.

Then suddenly there were brisk feminine footsteps. The feet of the guards crisped on the gravel and someone entered the copter, slammed the door shut and took off. It was difficult to realize it was in the air save for its slight unsteadiness.

Mike counted to ten, then got up and slipped into the seat alongside the pilot. "Nice going, Liza," he told her, putting his blast pistol back into the belt holster at his side.

"Mike!" The sari-like head-covering Liza had been wearing was flung back and he found himself staring into Magrita's adorable if somewhat vacuous features. "Mike, she told me I'd find a surprise waiting for me when she got me out of that horrible ship. But I had no idea *you* were waiting here."

"Why didn't she come back?" Mike asked, his voice strained.

Magrita looked at him, evidently hurt. "She—she gave me this note—to give to you. Here—you might as well read it."

Mike unfolded it and read the characteristically square and rebellious backhand scrawl in the tube light of the dashboard. He frowned, then read it again. It said—

Mike, honeycomb—I'm sending Magrita back to you along with Smitty's Hydronium—enough to do the trick.

Tell him the shield slipped in transfer. He'll understand. See you all later when I've got this whole mess squared.

Love, Liza.

Magrita tooled them expertly back to the palace roof. Not until they had landed did Mike say, "Where is it?"

"Is what?" The girl looked puzzled. Then, drawing a tiny cubical plastilead package from her garments, she handed it to him. "I guess you mean this," she said. And, looking as if she were about to cry, she added, "*Monsieur Mike*, you should not be angry with me. I could not help being kidnapped. I assure you, *Monsieur Mike*—"

"I'm not angry, honeyco—" He couldn't finish the word—not any more. And as he kissed Magrita and held her briefly in his arms he thought of the perfect feminine subtlety of Liza's vengeance. *If* he had interpreted her note correctly, that is.

SMITTY was pacing his carpet impatiently when Mike came hurrying in. He gave the older man the package and Liza's note. Smitty read the latter, his face greying as he did so.

"Smitty," said Mike anxiously, "does she mean what I—"

"Unless she is lying. And I doubt it. No, she got a load of hydronium radiation when she made the transfer into this box. It could happen easily enough." He shuddered, said, "Poor Liza."

"Are you sure it was accidental?" Mike asked. "I mean, it's quick and painless—and not too disfiguring."

Smitty shot him a startled glance, said, "Mike, you're getting altogether too shrewd for a young man of your years. But come on—if it was self sacrifice she wanted, let's not let its purpose go in vain. I have a hunch there is going to be plenty of trouble."

They were just starting toward the laboratory when the *Tellus Two* took off. Through the great window they could see its ever-increasing track of brilliant white light rising straight up—

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ward into the heavens. It grew faster, thinner, fainter. Then there was a sudden sharp glow as it went into overdrive. "Come on!" said Smitty.

They worked feverishly against time, sweating inside the plastilead suits which covered them from pate to sole, using delicate precision instruments instead of hands to insert the deadly hydronium into the core of the astracomunicator.

It was twenty-five minutes, Earth time, before Smitty locked the communicator door, nodded to Mike to put the instruments in a sterilizer and stepped out of his protective costume.

Mike watched him intently as he turned the directing coil dials, adjusted the power, then waited for the instrument to achieve maximum "warmth." For once Smitty forgot to fool with his pipe. "How long now?" the younger man asked him. "How long?"

"Ten seconds Earth," said Smitty, glancing at a clock affixed to the face of the communicator. "There will be a twenty-second lag after that for the message to get through. Then, in perhaps half a minute Earth, we should get our reply."

Smitty leaned toward the mouthpiece, then spoke. "This is Smith Jacobs of *Tellus* on Planet Planus, Proxima Three," he said and repeated the message. Then, "Calling Earth, Calling Earth. Urgent, urgent. Warning green coming, warning green coming. Over."

Seconds later a buzzer sounded and Smitty jumped up with a rare oath. "Someone's spotted us," he said, moved rapidly to peer into a spectroscopic screen. Then, to Mike's surprise, he talked the heavy door open. Professor Lantrec, disheveled and breathless, came stumbling in. "You're too late," he cried. "They've taken off."

"Quiet," said Mike. "Quiet, Dr. Lantrec—please!"

The aged scientific genius of Planus opened his mouth to speak but before he could say any more a new voice sounded over a hidden amplifier.

"This is Earth, this is Earth," it said and to Mike, used for ten years to Planian accents, it sounded unreal.

Earth, it appeared, had given them up as lost, had given up Planus for the time being as a bad job when they failed to report a successful landing. Other lost planets had been more successfully rediscovered and all attention had been focused on the more promising of them. Hence no more starships had been sent to Planus.

Smitty explained the situation in terse sentences, concluded with, "We have failed to head them off but at least, thanks to the heroism of Liza Farren, we are able to issue this warning. You know the nature of the peril. The rest is up to you."

There were some delays but to Mike's surprise there seemed little concern on Earth over the peril of the Planian visit. In a few minutes he learned why when the voice spoke again.

"We have ideal place for them on new planet, Earth type, fine climate, far distant from Type Three sun of Arcturus cluster. Will restore slow metabolism far faster than Earth. Colonization just being planned. We'll shoo them off there in quick time."

"Thank God!" said Dr. Lantrec. "It spells salvation for all our people."

"It will mean a lot of work," said Smitty somberly.

"But it will be worth it. And we can help. We can build some of the new starships when we are shown the way."

They talked on and exchanged further messages with the parent planet. Mike, filled with strange and unhappy lassitude, could only half listen. He thought of Liza and the mangled romance that had never been. And then he thought of Magrita and of Liza's final gesture in leaving the girl to him.

Damn all women, he thought. And then wearily he rose and said good night and walked slowly toward his own suite. Soon, he thought, he was going to take up smoking a pipe himself—like Smitty. Filthy *mutorse* and all.

OVERTIME



By MACK REYNOLDS

THE twenty questions game had petered out from lack of interest. Finally Lieutenant Johnny Norsen said, "Knock, knock."

Ensign Mart Bakr responded listlessly. "Who's there?"

"A Martian."

"A Martian who?"

The Beat of a Metronome Sets a Space Ship's Course!

Johnny Norsen sang, "When Johnny comes Martian home again, hooray, hooray."

Everybody in the wardroom of the spacecruiser *New Taos* groaned appropriately. The lanky Johnny Norsen slumped back in his chair, screwed up his homely face in disgust and muttered something to the effect that they didn't appreciate genius.

Bakr sat up and said, "That reminds me. Remember that other game that comes down from the same period? I think they called it *Handies*."

"Never heard of it," Dick Roland said.

Mart Bakr glowered at him. "Navigators should be seen, not heard. Look." He took his left ear in his right hand, stomped one foot up and down and tapped himself repeatedly on the head with his left hand. "What's this?"

Johnny Norsen called over to Doctr Thorndon. "Hey, Doc, Bakr's got space cafard. Worst case I ever saw."

Bakr grinned and said, "It's supposed to be a Mercurian Bouncer playing a bagpipe. Don't you get it?" He started stomping his foot up and down again and tapping his head vigorously.

They groaned again. "We get it but we don't want it," Norsen told him.

The ship's doctor looked up from his book. "You men better figure out something new to amuse yourselves or you'll all be down with cafard. You need something to stimulate your minds." He turned back to his volume, adding dryly, "If any."

COMMANDER Mike Gurloff had sauntered in just in time to catch Thorndon's words. He snorted. "Such as what, Doctr? I'll lay you two to one we've already tried every game and pastime devised by the human race in the last thousand years."

"After eight months in space, cooped up in quarters that'd make a sardine in his can think he was suffering from agoraphobia, what can you suggest that we haven't already done already? Not

that we don't need something new. Everybody's getting so stale we'll soon all be as worthless as navigators."

Dick Roland winced but didn't say anything. He should be used to the riding by now—it was all part of the game. But he wasn't. It still cut deep.

Doc Thorndon rubbed the end of his nose with a forefinger. "If it wasn't for the strict regulations on gambling . . ."

Commander Gurloff whose poker addiction was known throughout the system, snorted disgustedly.

The doctor went on, "But there're other things—some of them educational." He tapped the book he'd been reading. "Why not duplicate some of the early experiments in hypnosis? It'd probably be quite amusing and interesting at the same time."

"Hypnosis?"

"Of course," the doctor said. "An early method in psychotherapy for working upon the subconscious. It amounts to suspension of the higher cerebral functions by causing inhibition of the cortical cells, which is accomplished by monotonous gentle stimulation of a sense."

Johnny Norsen yawned, recrossed his long legs and closed his eyes as though ready for a nap. "Sounds fascinating—*fascinating*," he said. "I can't think of anything more likely to keep a man from contracting a jumping case of space cafard."

Doctr Thorndon smiled good humoredly. "That's a bit technical isn't it? What happens to a hypnotized person is that he is reduced from a state of polyideism, first to monoideism, finally to a state of vacuity and senselessness."

"You mean like a navigator?" Bakr murmured with a grin.

Without thinking, Dick Roland blurted, "When the day comes that we need a navigator on this ship you'll sing a different . . ." He cut himself off without finishing.

Commander Gurloff snorted. "We

should live so long, Mr. Roland. The *New Taos* is equipped with the Kad-auto-pilot. Seven thousand ships in the Solar System fleet have them and not one in the past hundred and fifty years has had to rely on its navigator."

"That means seven thousand navigation officers, occupying precious space, consuming precious stores, breathing priceless oxygen, have been cluttering up our ships for fifteen decades. Truthfully now, Mr. Roland, can you blame Ensign Bakr for being somewhat bitter?"

Dick Roland's face flushed. Gurloff was the most prejudiced of them all. The navigator said, "Evidently, the Solar System High Command thinks us necessary, sir. Emergencies . . ."

The commander grunted. "Emergencies can arise, eh? In a hundred and fifty years there hasn't been an example. Why, I'll give you odds of a . . ."

The doctor held up his hand. "Do you gentlemen want to hear about hypnosis or spend your time debating the oldest bone of contention in space?"

Commander Gurloff scowled and began to retort, changed his mind, turned on his heel and left the room again.

"That's one advantage of being the skipper," Johnny Norsen drawled. "If you get riled up about something, you've got your own private cabin to sulk in. The rest of us have to sit around in this two-by-four cubicle and look at each other's silly faces."

He sighed, slumped his long body further down into his chair and added, "Go on, Doc. Give us more of that double talk about—about whatever you were talking about."

"Where was I?"

Dick Roland took a deep breath and tried to erase the commander's words from his mind. "You had your hypnotized person senseless. Why couldn't you accomplish the same thing by whopping him over the head with a bottle?"

Doctr Thorndon said, "The interesting point is that the person who did

the hypnotising is in control of the subject."

Bakr asked listlessly, "How do you mean?"

"In control of his mind. He can order him about, relieve him of pain, cure him of various mental disorders, even physical ones for that matter. Hypnotism has been used for local anaesthesia and in some cases for major operations. There are other and sometimes extremely strange phenomena connected with it."

"Such as what?" Dick Roland asked, more interested now.

THE doctor shrugged. "Post-hypnotic suggestion, for one. The person hypnotized is given an order to be acted upon after awakening. He'll obey that order even under the most trying circumstances. But particularly fascinating is the fact that under hypnosis our usual concepts of time can be thrown askew."

Bakr shook his head. "This thing is getting screwier by the minute. What happens to time when you're hypnotized?"

Doctr Thorndon smiled. "You seem to think I'm pulling your leg. I'm quite sincere. Until more modern methods were evolved hypnotism was widely used in psychotherapy. And under its influence a subject's concept of time can be distorted. He can be convinced that time is passing either more slowly or more rapidly than usual and his thinking processes will speed up or slow down accordingly."

Johnny Norsen said skeptically, "I'd like to see you do it to me."

The doctor got to his feet. "I was hoping one of you'd bite. I'm interested myself. Wait until I get the hypnoscope and the metronome I've made." He hurried from the tiny wardroom.

Norsen stirred his long body uncomfortably. "His what?"

Doctr Thorndon was back with his things in time to answer the question. The hypnoscope was a device somewhat

similar in appearance to a camera synchronizer and featured a reflector through which flashing colors could be emitted.

"It just helps me put you under," he explained.

"That'll be a cold day on Mercury," Johnny Norsen muttered.

The doctor, first cautioning Roland and Bakr to be silent, stood before him. "Watch the lens," he said softly. Then, "Your sight is becoming dim and indistinct. Your eyes will soon feel heavy, very heavy, and your eyelids will tend to close . . . Numbness is creeping over your arms and legs . . .

"My voice seems muffled to you—it is becoming more muffled to you . . . You are getting sleepier—you cannot keep your eyes open . . . You now breathe slowly and deeply, slowly and deeply . . . Now as I pass my hand over your eyes, your eyes will close . . .

"Relax, let yourself go. Go to sleep but remember you are not really asleep and will hear all I say to you . . . Gradually you forget everything, forget everything, everything, everything. Your thoughts are like birds in the distance, vanishing, vanishing."

Doctr Thorndon stood back and eyed Johnny Norsen, half in surprise. "I'll be a makron," he said, "he's really under! I wasn't sure I could do it."

Roland and Bakr stared at Norsen, who sat stiff and quiet in a complete state of hypnosis.

"Let's see you make him do something," Bakr said in awe.

"Stand up," Thorndon told his subject. Norsen stood. "Sit down." He sat.

"Make him do something complicated," Bakr insisted.

The doctor rubbed the end of his nose with a forefinger. "I'll see how effective it is." He stared down at his victim. "Get up and walk over to the viewer. When you stand before it you will see an enemy ship and warn us of its presence."

Johnny Norsen got to his feet and walked over to the viewer and looked

into it intently. He turned to them, alarm in his eyes. "There's a Kraden ship within a few thousand miles!"

The doctor began to laugh, delighted with his success.

"Hey!" Roland called. "Am I also supposed to be hypnotized?"

"Of course not," the doctor said.

The navigator pointed an excited finger at the viewer. "I can see it too! A Morid class cruiser."

AN ALARM shattered the silence of the ship with nerve-racking insistence. The tramp of hurrying feet in the corridor, the shouts of non-coms, the clatter of machinery as half asleep gunners tried to get their space-rifles into firing position—added to the din which arose to an uproar in seconds.

The doctor groaned and slapped Norsen twice across the face. "Wake up," he shouted.

Johnny Norsen shook his head as though dazed and opened his eyes. "There!" he said triumphantly. "I told you you couldn't do it to me." He took in the ringing alarm, the clamor from the corridor outside.

"Holy Wodo!" he said, "an enemy and us deep inside their defenses. I gotta get to my post. Get out of my way, useless." He curtly brushed Roland to one side and, followed by Bakr, dashed into the corridor.

Even in the excitement of the moment a flush came to the navigator's face. He tried to retort but Norsen was gone.

Doctr Thorndon said, "Come on, Dick, we'll go to the hospital. If there are any wounded you can help me there."

The other answered excitedly, "I'd better report to the old man. He might have something more immediate for me to do."

Roland hurried out the door after Norsen and Bakr.

The doctor shook his head after him, then made his own way to the ship's small hospital. Actually there was small chance that he'd have work to do. It's

seldom you have wounded in a space battle. Either your enemy is destroyed and you left unscathed, or vice versa. It's all according to who gets in a tractorpedo first.

Ninety percent of the job of a ship's doctor in space is to prevent space cafard, that madness whose first symptom is claustrophobia, and which drives more than ten percent of spacemen to suicide or mental collapse.

Doctr Thorndon would have hated to admit it to Roland but the presence of a navigator on a long cruise was a god-send. Men under tension snap less quickly when they have a butt for their jokes and jibes. He wondered if that were one of the real reasons useless navigators were still kept aboard spacecraft.

Dick Roland had trouble getting to the bridge. Although theoretically he ranked as an officer, lieutenant sub-grade, it was impossible to make the men recognize a navigator as such. They ignored him as a rule. Now, in the stress of battle, they pushed and shoved him about as they dashed to their battle stations.

"Get the kert out of the way," a non-com gunner snapped, trying to swing his space-rifle into action.

It was useless to reply. The man's gun might make the difference between stopping a tractorpedo and saving the ship or being strewn about space.

He finally wedged himself through the door to the bridge and snapped to attention before the harried Commander Gurloff who was watching the progress of four already launched missiles.

"Reporting for duty, sir," Roland said.

Gurloff shot him a quick irritated glance. "What? What in the name of Wodo do you want?" He turned back to the viewer, peering anxiously into his magni-glass, trying to follow the course of his own tractorpedoes, watching desperately for enemy ones.

"Where do you want me, sir? What can I do?"

The commander straightened and glared at him. "What can you do? Get out of the way of the useful members of the crew—that's *all* you can do!" He whirled back to his magni-glass. "Mr. Bakr," he snapped, "four more projectiles!"

Dick Roland's face was crimson as he turned slowly and walked toward the door. Ensign Bakr grinned sourly as he passed. "You might try working out a course for hell, Roland—because if one of those last torps don't get through, that's where we're heading."

Roland didn't answer. He went back to the corridor and made his way past a half dozen bucking barking space-rifles to the hospital.

The doctor looked up from a bunk where he was sprawled, still reading his book on hypnotism. His eyes narrowed understandingly and he said, "I was afraid that'd happen, Dick. Don't let it get you. Under the circumstances, they're tight as violin strings.

"I don't know what they said but whatever it was it wasn't personal. This is the first fight you've seen and you didn't know it's traditional that navigators are kept out of it."

The navigator slumped down on a white stool. "You'd think we'd be given alternative duties so that we'd be of some use. That is," he added hurriedly, "when we aren't needed for navigation."

The doctor rubbed the end of his nose reflectively but didn't answer. There wasn't anything he could say.

They both remained unmoving, listening to the muffled roar of the space-rifles. Had there been atmosphere they could have heard as well the distant explosions of the tractorpedoes. As it was there was no way of telling whether theirs were getting through, whether the enemy's were being intercepted.

Roland ejaculated, "I wish we at least had a viewer in here."

The doctor said easily. "You could go on back to the wardroom if you wanted. But it'll probably be all over before you

get there. I'm surprised it's lasted this long."

They felt the hull of the *New Taos* shudder and both winced.

"Space-rifles," Roland blurted. "We must be awfully close for them to strafe us with space-rifles."

SUDDENLY there was silence. It lasted for half a minute, then the ship was resounding with hysterical cheers and shouts.

The doctor raised his eyebrows and said dryly, "Evidently we've emerged triumphant." He got to his feet. "Let's find out what happened." He rummaged in the medicine chest, coming up with a bottle which he held up to the other's view. "Brandy," he said. "Hoarded for eight months for a special occasion. This would seem to be it."

They made their way to the wardroom, the doctor clutching the bottle carefully under his arm, afraid it'd be dashed to the deck by the capering cheering crew, who were making a madhouse of the corridor.

They met Norsen at the wardroom door. His angular face wore a smile that reached from ear to ear and he clapped Roland on the back. "Listen," he crowed loudly to be heard above the din, "I'm so happy I even like navigators. You know what happened? The skipper headed smack for them, throwing off their estimators. We got so close they raked us once with their space-rifles."

Doctor Thorndon said wryly, "We felt it." He pushed open the door and they followed him inside.

"Sure," Norsen insisted, still grinning, "but you know what it means, don't you? It means we'll have to head home for repairs! Four months knocked off this cruise. Fleshpots of Calypso, here we come. I know a little Martian there who . . ." He broke off suddenly as the doctor set the bottle on the table. "Great Wodo! What's that?"

Mart Bakr entered behind them, his face beaming. "It's brandy," he yelled.

"I'm in love with Doc Thorndon."

Johnny Norsen scowled uncomfortably, conscious of his position as second in command. "Liquor in space is plenty taboo."

Thorndon glared at him in mock indignation. "Who said anything about liquor in space? Who's ship's doctor here, eh? Lieutenant Norsen, this is medicine and right now I prescribe it."

They all laughed and Bakr hurried to the sideboard for glasses.

While the doctor was pouring the drinks Roland asked quietly, "Just what happened?"

Norsen and Bakr both started talking at once, then turned and bowed to each other in elaborate courtesy. Bakr continued. "We caught the Kradens unaware. They'd never seen a Solar System cruiser this far in their galaxy. The old man got off four torps before they'd manned their battle stations. Then he headed straight for them. They never knew . . ."

"Listen," Norsen chimed in, exuberantly unable to keep quiet any longer. "Knock, knock."

"Here we go again," the doctor sighed. "All right, who's there?"

"Commander Gurloff."

"Gurloff who?"

The lanky Norsen began to sing raucously, "Gurloff my dreams I love you. Honest I do. You are so sweet . . ."

Bakr shook his head in disgust. "Not only does he dig up that prehistoric game but a flock of motheaten songs from the same period to go with it." He rolled his eyes up in surrender. "It's enough to give a man space cafarf. I think . . ." He broke off as the commander entered.

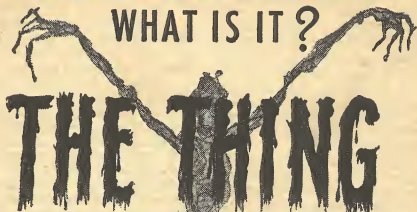
Thorndon began, "Congratulations, Commander and have a bit of medicine to . . ."

The skipper waved the doctor to silence with a flick of his hand. His face was set and his words came hard to him. "Mr. Roland," he said, "evidently this is the exception that proves the rule."

"Several space-rifle projectiles man-

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aged to pierce our hull. Of course, repairs have already been completed but the Kadauto-pilot's out of commission. It'll be necessary for you to set a course for our own galaxy."

Dick Roland had been sitting at the table, sipping at the precious brandy. He got to his feet suddenly now, spilling the drink. His eyes gleamed brightly. "Yes, sir!"

The commander scowled. "We're approximately eight hundred light years from our base, Mr. Roland. You're sure you can do it?"

"Yes, sir!"

Gurloff turned on his heel, saying, "We'd best be at it then. Crippled like this we can't afford to remain in the vicinity. Undoubtedly the enemy got off a warning before we finished him. This area will be swarming with Kraden ships within four hours." He left the wardroom without speaking to the others.

Mart Bakr slapped Roland on the

back. "By Wodo, you'll be the first navigator to get a medal in a hundred years if you bring us back."

JOHNNY NORSEN grinned. "Did you get a load of the skipper? He feels like kert after being so rough on Dick, here. Navigators have been his pet peeve for ten years. Now he has to depend on one to pull him out of a hole."

Dick Roland grinned back at them. "See you later, boys," he said and followed the commander.

As they progressed down the corridor toward the tiny emergency navigation room they passed groups of the crew, less boisterous now. Evidently the word had spread that the automatic pilot was out and they were helpless to get under way until a course was computed. They were space-wise enough to realize that it was suicide to remain in this area very long, that the enemy would soon be swarming around like gnats.

"Get us out of here, Lieutenant," one

said softly as Roland and the commander passed. There was a satisfying undertone of friendliness in the voice. From the corner of his eye the navigator saw it was the non-com who had jostled him roughly during the battle.

Commander Gurloff said over his shoulder, "Of course, I studied a certain amount of navigation while at space school at New San Diego but it's been so long. What will you need for your computations?" His tone of voice was still uncompromising.

"Our present position as accurately as you can give it to me, sir," Roland said. "It needn't be too very accurate at that. We'll get to the general vicinity of the Solar System through hyper-space. Then we can proceed by ordinary pilot-ing to the base."

Gurloff grunted. "How long will it take? We've got to get out of here."

"About a half hour."

The commander snorted. "A few minutes ago I would have given a thousand to one odds that I'd never see the day when a navigator was used on a modern ship."

"Yes, sir," Dick Roland said, trying to keep satisfaction from his tone.

They crowded into the navigation room and the commander phoned the bridge for their latest estimated position while Roland sat himself down before the key-punch to prepare his IBEM cards. He quickly punched up the half dozen cards needed, added the information the skipper gave him on their present position and took them to the Collating-Computer which stood in a corner. He put the cards into their hopper, switched the machine on, and pressed the start button.

The cards didn't move.

Faintly surprised, Roland scowled and squatted down to see if the machine was plugged in. It was. He got to his feet, checked to see if he'd performed correctly the simple operations necessary to feed the information into the computer. He had. He pressed the start

button again. The cards remained motionless.

Dick Roland ran his tongue over his lips. An icy hand gripped his heart. He hadn't been afraid during the battle. There had been nothing to do but wait for one of two alternatives—death or victory. But now he felt fear.

Commander Gurloff said irritably, "What's the matter?"

"Probably nothing much, sir. Give me a hand so we can push this machine into the open where I can take a look at it. There's nothing wrong with the ship's power, is there?"

"Don't be a fool," Gurloff snorted. "If there was the lights wouldn't be on."

They rolled the Collating-Computer into the middle of the tiny room and Roland stooped to check his wiring board.

He stood up, his face ashen.

Gurloff barked at him. "What's wrong, mister?"

"It's stopped a shell fragment. This compartment must have been hit by the enemy space-rifles."

The commander squinted at the compartment wall against which the IBEM machine had been stationed. There was a small jagged hole, already plugged by the plasti-sponge which packed the space between the double hulls. "Well," he snapped, "what does it mean?"

"It means my equipment is ruined to the point where it will take days to repair. There's seventy-five miles of wire in one of these things." He paused for a pregnant moment. "Maybe I won't be able to repair it at all."

Gurloff's voice was ominous. "I thought you men were trained to navigate under any circumstances, even without instruments."

"It's—it's not that. With the IBEM machines I'd have our course within a half hour. Without them it will take six hours or more."

"Six hours! Are you insane? We've got to get out of here! What's so complicated about setting a course for home that would take six hours?"

Dick Roland ran an irritated hand through his hair. "It's not that, sir. It's not complicated. I could do it in my head. It's just long. It'll take time—six hours *at least*."

GURLOFF started to speak, stopped. His face was going dark with suppressed fury. When he finally spoke his voice trembled. "Mr. Roland, in three or four hours the Kraden fleet will be here. We've defeated one of their Morid class cruisers but we couldn't stand for seconds against one of their heavy ships.

"There's only one safe place in space for us to go—back to our own galaxy where we'll have protection. Anywhere else we might try to escape is out of the question—they'd track us down. We *must* set a course for the Solar System in the next few hours. I leave it to you." He spun around and slammed his way through the door.

Dick Roland looked after him for a moment, his face white and expressionless. He turned his eyes down to his desk and the punched cards lying upon it. It was utterly undeniably hopeless. The machine was beyond immediate repair. Without it he would need a minimum of six hours to work out the problem. The cold clutching hand about his heart returned.

A voice said easily, "Something wrong, Dick?"

He looked up to see Doctr Thorndon in the doorway. As usual the older man's eyes were kindly, understanding, but now there was also the touch of fear in them that the navigator knew must permeate all the ship.

Roland explained the situation briefly.

The doctor rubbed the end of his nose with a forefinger. "That's not so good. But we aren't going to get anywhere this way. Five precious minutes have already gone."

Roland turned to sit at his desk. "It's hopeless but I guess you're right. I'll get to work."

The doctor shook his head. "That's

not what I meant. You aren't going to do a six-hour problem in three in your present frame of mind. Come back to the wardroom, have some of that brandy and relax. Given a clear mind you might hit on something."

"No, that won't do," Dick Roland told him. "It's not just a matter of thinking of a short cut. It's a six-hour problem, Doc. The best mathematician in the System couldn't do it in much less."

But he followed the doctor to the wardroom. He could use the brandy. In his present frame of mind it would take *ten* hours to work it out. Five minutes of relaxation would be the best way possible to spend the time.

Bakr looked up from where he sat, his feet resting easily on the wardroom table. "Finished already?" he asked smilingly, his face a trifle red from the brandy he had been drinking. "When I get home I'm going to throw the biggest . . ."

He noted Roland's drawn face and came suddenly to his feet. "Something wrong?"

The doctor said briefly, "The IBEM machines were knocked out in the fight. They can't be used. It will take at least six hours to work out a course by hand."

Bakr's face tightened, his voice went shrill. "I thought you navigators . . ."

"Quiet," Doc Thorndon snapped, the first time either of them had heard his voice betray emotion. "Roland is our one chance. It's obviously impossible to do a six-hour problem in three. If he can think of some alternative . . ."

"There isn't any," the navigator began to say desperately. "There isn't any alternative."

Commander Gurloff spoke from the doorway. "No, of course not. For a hundred and fifty years every ship in the fleet has carried a navigator. For all that time they've been less than worthless. Space, food, air consumed and nothing done in return.

"Now, after a century and a half, a navigator is needed." The rage in his

voice became more evident as the words flowed. "And what happens? We're condemned by lack of the makron's ability to do his stupid job!"

SOMETHING snapped in Roland's mind. He yelled back, "And you're glad—happy about it! It was unbearable to you, the possibility that the men you've vilified could really be indispensable under certain conditions.

"Now that I can't do the job in a set time, you're triumphant. You'd rather see the ship destroyed and everyone in it than have navigators vindicated. You've hypnotized yourself into a frame of mind that can't . . ."

Roland stopped short. "*Hypnotized!*"

The navigator swung on Doctor Thornton excitedly. "Listen . . ."

Commander Gurloff opened his mouth to begin the roar of the absolute dictator—the skipper of a military craft in wartime, in a battle zone—who has been defied. "Shut up, Gurloff," a voice behind him said.

He whirled in amazement.

It was Johnny Norsen, leaning his long body easily against the doorway. "You heard what the doc said. Roland is our one chance. Leave him alone. He doesn't need any riding now." The lanky second in command seemed relaxed but his eyes were narrow and hard.

Dick Roland hadn't heard any of this last. He was facing Thornton excitedly. "Listen, Doc. What did you say about thinking processes being speeded up or slowed down under hypnosis?"

The doctor scowled at him. "Humph. The book says so—I don't know anything about it. What has it to do with . . ." The other's point suddenly came to him. He took his nose between thumb and forefinger and pulled it gently, thoughtfully. "I see what you mean." His voice fell off again and he shook his head. "No, I don't think . . ."

"We could try it," Roland insisted. "There's nothing else."

The doctor shook his head again. "Even if your brain processes were

speeded up you couldn't use pencil and paper fast enough."

The spark of excitement had touched the commander. "What in kерт are you two talking about?"

Bakr said, "Thornton told us that under hypnosis a person can be made to think faster."

Gurloff snorted. "You mean that a hypnotized man could do a problem . . ." Suddenly he caught it too. "*Try it,*" he snapped.

Ten minutes later Dick Roland sat before the wardroom table. His papers were before him. He tried to impress them photographically on his mind. The others, with the exception of the doctor, sat silently in the background, eyeing the navigator nervously. Thornton stood before him, hypnoscope in hand, his metronome on the table.

"All right," Roland said finally. He looked up at the flickering colors in the doctor's instrument.

"Fix your eyes on this," the doctor said softly. "Your eyelids are getting heavy and will soon close . . . Your vision is getting dim and misty . . . Your arms and legs are getting heavy . . . Numbness is creeping over your limbs . . . My voice is becoming muffled to you . . . You are getting sleepier . . . You cannot now keep your eyes open.

Doctor Thornton stepped back and peered closely at the navigator. "He's under," he breathed.

He started the metronome beating.

"Each tick you hear is one quarter of a minute passed," he said softly. He let it beat for a time, then slowly increased its speed.

"You are working mentally upon the computation of our course back to base. You will do it as rapidly as you can."

He speeded up the metronome again, and later again, and yet again, until the ticking was so rapid as to be almost separately indistinguishable.

After a few moments he said, "When you have finished the problem you will awake and write the answer."

He dropped back into a chair himself

with a grunt of exhaustion and stared at the navigator, who sat stiff and still, his eyes closed, his breath coming fast and deep as that of a man who has rapidly climbed a steep hill. Gurloff, Bakr and Norsen sat tensely along the walls of the wardroom. "This is insane," the commander muttered. "I should have known better than . . ."

The doctor waved him impatiently to silence. "In his trance he thinks that each beat of that pendulum is a quarter of a minute. If my books on the subject are correct he is living, in his mind, hours of time to our minutes."

The metronome flicked back and forth so rapidly that its arm seemed a continual blur. Other than its ticking there was silence in the room. After a time the commander got to his feet and walked quietly to the viewer. His face was gray. Roland suddenly opened his eyes. He picked up a pencil and noted down a dozen figures. A heavy sweat was on his forehead.

Gurloff strode quickly over and picked

up the paper. "This is it?"

The navigator nodded his head. "I checked it twice. That's it, all right."

The commander stared at him, a flicker of respect in his eyes, then down at the course. "I'll lay ten to one you're right at that, Dick." He tore from the room, heading for his bridge. Thorndon, Norsen and Bakr let their breath out as one.

"How long did you say it would have taken the machines?" the doctor asked.

Roland said shakily, "About half an hour. Why?"

"You beat them," Thorndon told him.

There was a long exhausted silence.

Finally the irrepressible Johnny Norsen grinned and said, "Knock, knock."

"All right," Bakr sighed. "Who's there?"

"Roland."

"Roland who?" Bakr grinned.

Norsen sang, "Roland home, Roland home. Dick's all right and plenty bright, so we roll, roll, roll . . ."

They all groaned.

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I'm a Stranger, Myself

By DALLAS ROSS

"Howdy," said the rube to the Martian. "Having trouble, brother?"

THE strange looking craft zipped over the horizon like a flash, coming from the general direction of Binghamton. I wouldn't even try to estimate its speed. It had nearly reached a point directly above my south forty, where the cows are, when I saw it give its first flutter.

I had been standing at the window, you realize, and saw it from the very first. The way it was acting, I could see clearly that it wasn't going to get much further. It seemed to catch once or twice and speed on—but then the same flutter would come back. Suddenly it dipped and headed for the ground.

I hurried out the door and across the fields as fast as I could make it, hoping that nobody would be injured in the crash but thinking that if anyone was I'd be able to assist in dragging them from the wreckage.

It was a relief to find that, although the queer looking aircraft had come down, it hadn't exactly crashed. The pilot had evidently made a successful landing. I got there just in time to see its sole occupant climb angrily from his cockpit. No one else seemed to have been aware of the landing. It was early in the morning, scarcely dawn.

He was an ordinary looking chap—about six feet tall, about one eighty in weight, with rather homely looking features, just then screwed up in a peevish expression. Evidently he was in a particular hurry and this forced landing wasn't on his schedule. "Howdy," I said. "Having trouble, brother?"

He was standing on one of his ship's very stubby wings. At my words he turned and looked down at me in disgust. He started to open his mouth to snap something at me—but then he closed it and went to work unscrewing a section of his ship about six feet back of the plastic-bubble-enclosed cockpit. Evidently he was preparing to attempt to repair it. He muttered to himself.

"Kinda a queer looking airship you got here, brother," I said in as friendly a tone as I could. "You one of these here now test pilots for the Air Force?"

H E HAD got the section off and was peering down into the interior of the ship. At my words he turned.

"No," he snapped, "I'm not an Air Force test pilot. I'm a Martian." He leaned over into his cockpit and got some tool or other.

That set me back for a minute. I wasn't surprised at his being irritated—after all, you don't make a forced landing without being somewhat upset. But I didn't expect him to say anything like that.

"Go on," I told him. "You're josh-

ing me! You don't expect me to believe you're really from Mars."

Without turning he said to me, his voice sharp with ill humor, "No I'm not. I'm a Martian, part of an expedition whose purpose is to map and investigate this oddly stupid planet."

"Bosh! If you was really a Martian you wouldn't tell me. You'd pretend to belong here."

He turned and wagged something that looked like a screwdriver at me. "Why? Why would I have to bother to lie to such as yourself?" he sneered.

I rubbed my hand over my beard, took my bandana out of my hip pocket and blew my nose—just to give myself time to think. This certainly was uncalled for. "Well, besides," I told him finally, "you look just like us. If you was a Martian . . ."

He turned to get back to his repairs again. "Our scientists went to considerable trouble to give us human forms," he said as he worked. "Now I believe it was unnecessary. You Earthlings are so utterly stupid that our efforts to be secretive are wasted."

I shuffled my feet around a bit impatiently. "Well," I said argumentatively, "if you was a Martian, what'd you want to be secretive for? Why not just come right out and land here on Earth and make friends?"

He had returned to the cockpit again for still another tool. He took a moment to face me and say bitingly, "Because we have no desire for friendship with the human race. Our plans are and have been for centuries to conquer this planet with the idea of colonizing it and enslaving the present population."

"As Mars grows colder and loses its atmosphere it becomes increasingly necessary to find a new world. Earth is to be taken over immediately—in future centuries we will probably move on to Venus."

I stared at him, scoffing. "This is a mighty silly conversation—mighty silly," I told him. "If the Martians were really going to try and conquer the

earth they wouldn't have waited until now to do it. They could have come down and done it centuries ago when the inhabitants were more backward and wouldn't have been able to defend themselves."

"You *still* won't be able to defend yourselves," he said. "Your military machine is ridiculous. Your people divided into a hundred nations, all at odds with each other—your weapons different in each army—your latest devices carefully kept secret from others of your own kind."

"Nope," I said, "I still think that if these here now Martians were a going to try to conquer us they'd have done it a considerable spell ago."

He was back at his work but he continued to talk to me, just for somebody to snap at. "It is of no value to conquer slaves that have no skills. We have been watching Earth for centuries, waiting until its most advanced life form reached an industrial development which would guarantee a trained labor force for us when we did assume domination. You have reached that point."

EVIDENTLY the ship was almost repaired now. "All bosh," I told him. "If you was really a Martian you wouldn't have told me all this."

He began screwing the section back into place. He said sneeringly, "I've done it to amuse myself. This is a classic example of the stupidity of you humans. Here you have the whole story, our secret plans—and what of it? If you notify the authorities they'll throw you into an asylum."

"A what?" I asked him.

"An institution for lunatics."

I scratched my chin reflectively. "Guess you're right at that. If I told folks a Martian had landed in my fields and told me the Earth was about to be invaded they'd think I was batty. But there oughta be some way to—"

He shot a scoffing glance at me and began climbing back into his cockpit. "Just try it," he said. "Our invasion

starts in just two weeks—and there's no reason to believe that Earth will know what is happening to her until it is far too late."

He wasn't so sore, now that he had his ship all ready again. "Stand back, old man," he growled, "you might get hurt in my take-off. You farmers are going to be just as necessary slaves as any others. No use in killing you now."

I got back out of the way in a hurry and watched his ship zip down the length of the field and shoot into the air. In seconds it was out of sight.

I stood watching after it for a long time. Finally I shrugged and made my way back to the farmhouse.

I went into the kitchen and lifted the trap door to the cellar and climbed down the steep steps. I touched the button at the side of the coal bin and the wall slid neatly in. Before me was the transmitter. I sat down to it and sent the following message.

"Suspicious correct. My *tadr* set picked up a Martian *zetercraft* headed in the direction of this post at 22 hours. I immediately switched on the *solan* and was successful in neutralizing his *morani* ignitors. He came to Earth within a quarter mile of my station, evidently unsuspecting the nature of his forced landing.

"I walked out to meet him, assuming, naturally, my Earthling disguise. He was in a high rage and under its influence revealed the plans of the Martian High Command, thinking me a country oaf. I encouraged and goaded him, of course.

"Briefly the Martians are to commence their attack in two weeks time. They plan to completely destroy all Earth forces without warning and then to enslave the remaining populace. Eventually, he revealed, they expect to extend their dominion to Venus as well.

"If we Venusians are to counteract this, we must act immediately."

"Signed, Mar Posit
Agent IVXII
Station XIII, Earth"

By **RAYMOND Z. GALLUN**



The First Long Journey

*—was like being sentenced
to an unimaginable
solitary confinement!*

HE HAD been considered normal and tough but since starting this Journey he had developed the habit of speaking to himself as if he were twins. Also to absent people—and to surrounding objects.

"Like Crusoe without Friday," he

thought. "But cooped up together out here, two guys would probably murder each other in a month. Besides needing tons more of supplies. Good thing I get along well with myself."

He had to lie on his stomach in his craft's cabin, which was like a big round pipe, four feet in diameter and padded inside. He called it his Diogenes Tub. Gaudy girl-pictures were pinned to the padding. At the forward end of this odd compartment, there was a thick window of darkened quartz and an array of instruments and controls.

At the other end was an electric stove, to which in the absence of gravity a pressure-cooker could be clamped. Also, there was a hatch through which he could crawl aft inside the hull, drawing himself along by means of straps and stanchions, to inspect machinery.

Checking over the tanks where his air bubbled through the green slime of plant chlorophyll to be purified or making sure again that his fission-jet engines were ready to function once more when it was time to brake his craft's velocity, he would steal a moment to admire braces and struts that were nicely pared out to give the greatest strength with the least mass. Or to pat affectionately some wolfish mechanism that would have been at home with the farthest stars.

"Tin Can," he'd say to his ship, "you're wonderful—automatic, sure of yourself. There's no split in your personality. Like in a man, who wants the distance, the different. While maybe finding out that he likes rocking chairs better. Wish I were like you . . ."

Of course he'd grin and chuckle as he tried thus to borrow companionship and strength from metal. His self-confidence, as good as anyone's for hair-trigger living, had here boiled away like liquid air left in a vacuum, as if he had passed a barrier beyond which courage did not reach.

Sometimes he'd spiel personal data to the reflection of his hard face in some burnished surface, as if to convince him-

self of who he was in this vastness.

"You're Chester Ross, born in Colorado, June seventeenth, nineteen fifty-six. Twenty-three years old. Light hair, grey eyes, one hundred forty-six pounds—on Terra Firma. High emotional-stability and self-sufficiency scores by Army test. Efficient thinking under strain. Tops. So you were picked from all the others for this historic job. Besides, you were wild to go."

NEAR the stern of the ship there was a bullseye window—and during those belly-crawling tours of inspection he'd peer through it worriedly. To one side of the dazzling sun was a planet that had shrunk until it was no brighter than Venus used to be on a summer evening of his kid-days. Near it was a faint spark—the Moon.

Peeking like that was a bad habit. It gave some idea of how completely normalcy could slip away behind millions of miles. There was claustrophobia in it. From months ago, soon after the beginning of the Journey, he had the memory of the space-vertigo and of hysteria.

The latter could return. So he would clutch at a girder under the window and reason his rebellious and primitive nerves back toward calmness by reciting what, to his intellect, was the most obvious part of history.

"During World War Two, before your time," he'd mutter, "experts began to see that trips like this would really be made. Maybe in thirty years. The power was in sight. A minimum velocity of seven miles per second, built up in—say—twenty minutes, so that the pilot wouldn't be hurt by too-rapid acceleration, meant escape from Earth's gravity and a gliding on, without additional jet-thrust, in empty space.

"You've got to realize how things are. You know that the Army has had its Moonbase and fortress for almost a year, now. You started out from there—to here. Most guys don't go buggy at Moonbase anymore. Seeing the airless

mountains doesn't matter.

"They've got barracks, rec-halls, hydroponic gardens, even a library—bored under the pumice plain and provided with a sealed-up atmosphere. Moonbase is civilized and close to home. It's just a few hours flight back to America. And this trip is just a long step farther out."

Chet Ross could soothe himself a little, talking like that. But the calm never penetrated the depths of him. It sometimes seemed that the urge to get acquainted with the unknown, older than the cavemen's first scared though fascinated toying with fire, was finally reaching too far for its own strength. That it would cease to give a thrill and a boost to progress but would bog down and wither in a nostalgia that could have no past equal.

It seemed that instinct and ages of conditioning had tied even the adventurous to Earth, till elsewhere even their reflexes seemed out of step—till in spite of dreams they couldn't really belong anywhere else. Till one's being far beyond the Earth—and far beyond the Moon—was somehow inconceivable.

Often, of course, Ross slipped into reverie—thinking of a hayfield full of daisies under a summer sun, for instance. Though he used to dislike daisies. Or, better yet, remembering a certain evening of walking on a university campus while fine friendly snow fell.

Walking with a little dark girl named Helen Collins. Helen who was pretty but slightly shabby. Whose earnestness was almost grim, though gentle. Who had the bug of deep distance in her eyes too. But who, perhaps like all women, put the vine-covered cottage and kids first. That evening of fine snow was when the news came that Crobert had landed the first manned rocket on the Moon.

Then talk of that time came back to Ross silently. "Yeah, Helen—but here are two urges that don't match. You gotta choose—high or low, hard or

easy. Anyway, we'll write letters."

He still had her last letter, crumpled up in a pocket of his dirty dungarees. Saying that she might be rocketed out at last—to an office job at Moonbase. Should he remember a choice with bitterness now in a harsh present that did not match a dream—and ask for comfort? Or should he stand his ground?

In his pipelike cabin he talked often to Helen as if she were there too. He'd look through the alloy-ribbed window ahead, toward where he was going.

Once he said, "Now it's the size of an agate bead, Helen—with a white dot at one end. The south polar cap . . ."

The days were clicked off on his chronometer and his ship continued on outward, adding more millions of miles away from everything that he knew best. Until his destination was really getting close.

IT LOOKED like a big rusty bubble. Fuzzy mottlings of grey-green belted its equator. It was ugly and beautiful. The polar cap, blurred at the edges, was tilted half into view. It looked the size of a dinner plate now. This being earliest spring there, it was at its greatest extent—almost two thousand miles across. The dimensions of things, still dwarfed by distance, continued to hide unmeasured detail.

The whole view was like a colored photograph of the planet Mars, taken through a telescope: Which was not remarkable.

"The trouble is, Helen," Ross said, "how can a guy convince his insides that he's going to mingle his physical self with something from an astronomer's picture very soon? They just can't believe it. They're plodding and skeptical and primitive—unlike one's imagination. They're too used to knowing that the planets are forever out of reach. To insist that they're wrong only scares hell out of them."

Ross had a vision then—himself, at about fifteen years of age, sitting in a public library with a book full of colored

plates of Mars. Trying to imagine what wonders the distance and the blurring concealed, but still hinted at. While the text gave suggestions to whet one's romantic appetite.

That Mars was small—little more than half the diameter of the Earth. It was half again as far from the sun—hence colder. Its air at the surface was perhaps as rare as at a fifty-thousand-foot terrestrial altitude. It was arid and senile. Its noonday temperature rarely rose much above fifty degrees Fahrenheit.

It was probably too harsh a place ever to have evolved thinking inhabitants—not to say men. But almost certainly the grey-green areas, waxing and waning and changing color regularly with the seasons, revealed hardy plant-life. That, at the very least.

Oh, sure—take that yearning of the youngster, safe in a library, to walk on those plains, to see, to know—to add to human culture. To be perhaps the first. Match all that with now and with the next hour to come.

"You see how it is, Helen," Chet Ross said for the tenth time. "Here imagination and fact are nothing alike. One is pleasant. The other is—well—what would *you* call it? And back there, there's a million kids, just like the kid I was. Who'd make fun of them while they reach for a new frontier? Even if there's a cheat in their own bodies? Why can't dream and truth get together on this—or at least not be so far apart?"

Ross sounded very plaintive again. "But I'll blunder through if I live, Helen," he insisted doggedly. "And who's scared of getting killed? Lots of people have got killed. That's not *new*—not *new* as everything else is going to be . . ."

His words, he saw, touched upon some deep human fear.

And he rifled back through the events of his past again, to the way he used to riffle through the pages of science-fiction magazines.

"We used to think we'd be darting

around the whole Solar System, Helen," he went on, "as soon as somebody worked out the last mechanical obstacles. We didn't know that perhaps the real obstacle to that much range might be in us, the yappers, the romantics—in human nature, that needs shelter from things too harsh and unfamiliar.

"The black sky of space—the hard stars—could a man live for a year in a steel shell at the bottom of the ocean with plenty of food and air but in darkness and silence? Could he stand it? Maybe this is the same or worse. And sometimes we even wanted to be on intimate terms with the stars."

His voice wavered. He wondered if he was getting irrational. Better hang on tight. He still had a hope. He hated to see a key-principle going to pot—that seeking to learn what seemed unknowable was the best of life.

He kept watching Mars. It was growing faster now. It looked huge. The murk over the polar cap had extended a foggy finger down beyond its brim. It meant slow winds moving, carrying thin tawny clouds, half dust, perhaps, and half moisture, squeezed out of the dryness by cold.

On the far side of the equator, just for a fleeting instant, he thought he saw several fine lines, artificial-looking, straight as a ruler's edge and just at the limit of visibility. Then they were gone, lost in the wavering of the atmosphere. And an old riddle turned dully and yet nervously in his tired mind, prodded not by eager interest, but by something kindred to dread.

Were the Canals of Mars real—the great irrigation system that Percival Lowell had once visualized? Or were they optical illusions as most other astronomers had claimed? Not even the best new telescopes had been able to answer that for sure, through magnified atmospheric irregularities.

"Last minutes of pure not-knowing," Ross told himself, this time silently. It was not a thrill now. Rather, it was

like too much adrenalin, straining his heart.

WITHIN a matter of moments Mars would cease to resemble a true globe, would become more like a tremendous dome that flattened visibly as he hurtled toward it. He could imagine—though he would not be watching...

He hurried to don his vacuum armor and oxygen helmet, to strap himself prone—supposed precautions against accident, part of a plan. He beat the retard-jets' blasting to brake his many-miles-per-second velocity by fifteen seconds.

The jets cut loose automatically, controlled by the robot piloting devices that, groping with radar, could find a goal, calculate timing and needed strength and direction of forces, could bring a ship in—all much more efficiently than any human agent.

Streams of tenuous radioactive gases, heated to 50,000 degrees, shot forward at a sizable fraction of the speed of light. From the zero-poundage of free-fall, Ross' weight increased enormously, dragging him toward the window. He might have seen the fringes of the flame but he did not want his retinas seared by such a glare. He lay with his helmeted head between his arms, waiting for the thrust of deceleration to end.

An instrument clicked slowly, warning of a leak of radiation through the shielded hull. It was not enough to be dangerous.

During part of the fifteen minutes, Ross wished helplessly that the jets could roar on until they pushed him back to Earth. As if you could reverse a ship locked in a trajectory across space. Or as if, during the Journey, his native planet hadn't moved out of favorable range, which only the better part of a year of orbital movement could restore.

The silence came abruptly. With a soft whirl the ship's retractable wings slid out of their sockets. Its course flattened. There was a rising whisper—

a few bouncing jolts—and the Tin Can was airborne. Here, at least, was an atmosphere to fly in. It wasn't like the Moon, where you had to lower your rocket precariously on its jet-streams.

Ross began to pilot the ship manually, as was expected of him. In a way he was glad to be alone. One man could keep his own secrets of funk. Some Army psychologists were pretty smart.

Without a plan he would hardly have known what to do. He was grateful that his training and so much of his private imagining had been aimed at this moment. He was flying south across the desert, avoiding the grey-green areas that his map showed. Reason said that there could be no harm in those regions. Yet the desert seemed simpler, less likely to produce surprises impossible to foresee. Beneath him all that was visible were thin trains of dust, marching across the plain with the wind.

He switched on his radio. Of course he was completely out of range of terrestrial stations. Yet an idea scrambled in his nerves like a clutch of mice. On Mars, how could he distinguish the scratchy twitter of static that he heard from real messages? Even speech? This world had been separate from Earth since their coincident birth two billion years ago. Everything *had* to be different.

More such nervous gropings were inevitable here. The best man-made theories seemed less substantial than smoke beside the unknown. The improbable myth of Martian superbeings, whose science enabled them to live comfortably on a dying world, began to haunt him. Had his ship already been seen? Maybe—if life here, sprung from a necessarily far different path of evolution, had developed eyes. What would a radar instrument, developed by an extra-terrestrial intelligence, look like?

Ross floundered deeper and deeper into imponderables, his hide puckering. How could he know that there was nothing to attack him when even his habits of reasoning seemed to have lost their

validity? What form unfriendly action might take was equally beyond guessing.

He tried an old argument on himself, speaking aloud, "If Mars has inhabitants, why didn't they visit Earth long ago? Spacetravel would be easier for them—blasting off against a gravity only thirty-eight percent of the terrestrial.

"Besides, Mars, being smaller than the Earth, had cooled sooner, could have produced life and intelligence sooner. The Martians—if they existed—could be millions of years ahead of us in science. Why didn't they come?"

But the answers that came to Ross were old and led nowhere—except to stir up more the diseased speculation that was his main trouble now. "How do you know that they *didn't* visit Earth? And if they didn't, why should they? For conquest? For metals that they could make by transmutation in their labs?

"Or, like us, to know the unknown—for understanding, for more complete awareness? How do you know that their drives, their psychology, are anything like ours? Unless they're tied to Mars, as we have been to Earth. So—trying to figure things out—you're just lost. Yet—better wait and see."

THUS Ross tried to stop the wheels that were going around in his head. But shadows still moved there. A memory of an old story that he'd felt vividly. About engines and pumps and a thing like a bundle of leather, the color of dust, whose complicated breathing organs rasped in the tenuous atmosphere and whose I. Q. was around 250.

That vision tried to answer something—giving form to a formless possibility and thus reducing the strain of a complete enigma. But it accomplished the opposite. For he told himself that such a mind-image was silly and naive—that the truth, if there were or ever had been such a truth, would be unlike any-

thing that his own or any other human fancy could conceive.

Such an eerie idea could not add to his comfort. Nor was the alternate probability of being on an unpeopled world much better. No Earth-creature had ever been so utterly cut off and alone as he. With all of his kind so far away that it was hard to think of them as still living in the same plane of time. They might have died out a thousand years ago.

Ross flew on, Mars unrolling beneath him. Not dead like the Moon, not as harsh. But the Moon had had a simple volcanic history. It held no pendant secrets, no crushing strangeness.

For a few minutes the polar cap remained out of sight, sunk beneath the southern horizon. But presently, as Ross was pushed on by occasional bursts from his stern-jets, it reappeared again—a flat thin line of white, blurred by a cold-looking haze.

Ironic, wasn't it, that on an arid unknown planet he still knew just where to go to find water—for the months that, according to plan, he was supposed to stay here—*had* to stay here?

He shot on, circling high above the dun-colored plain, that met the cap under a fog-blanket. Radar told him that the ground below was solid enough. So he circled lower and began to glide in for a landing.

Approaching the ground he glimpsed details that distance had once hidden. Granite pinnacles sticking through the shallow white expanse—and on the plain a low straight-edged ridge. It *might* have been a dyke, modern or as ancient as its extinct builders. And a humped, roundish thing—probably a great boulder—though it *could* be something else. On Earth structures matched the form of man. For instance, they had stairways because human legs were made a certain way. But there again there was no yardstick for comparison.

Near the humped shape something glinted for an instant in the light of the small, dazzling sun. Metal—or just

crystals of a quartz outcropping? As Ross' ship settled both the rounded mass and the glint were hidden behind the ridge.

To one side of the plain itself, clearly in view, were clumps of grey stalks, leaved with tattered whorls that looked as dry as paper. No doubt they were lifeless in the cold before the real spring came.

Now Ross' landing wheels were jolting across the plain. This was supposed to be his moment of triumph—the moment people would want to know about, to celebrate. It should have something poetic in it, representing a widened horizon, a deepened knowledge.

He still had cherished a hope that somehow it would be like that at the end. But what was left of the hope began to fade. For his key-feeling was a grinding tension. In part it was almost embarrassment, as if, having pried his way with vast effort through a wrong door, he was where he had no right or excuse to be. Like some deep-sea fish who had aspired to behold the sun.

As he had suspected the tether was shorter than the urge to reach out—and far short of the glamour. He was blocked and defeated. The lack of scope lay deep in his own primitive flesh. And his nerves were supposed to be more rugged than most. Men would never hold other worlds. The newness and strangeness were too much—though they should have been rich.

Here were two billion years of different history, written in the rocks. Paleontology, biology—more than enough, even if there had never been intelligence. Clearer hints, even, of the birth and development of planets. Stuff for eager study. That was the way he had imagined it—the way people wanted it back home. High romance . . .

But the way it was was this other way. Even his regret flattened out and lost itself dully in an overpowering homesickness. On Earth he had hardly known that such a thing existed. What was around him now seemed like a book

that he did not want to read. It repelled him even while it still fascinated him.

EVEN the smiles of his pinup girls looked sardonic and out of place here. "You see how it is, Helen?" he muttered, reaching for the comfort of a habit. But the good of it was gone, as if the emotions that went with it were impossible in a region as remote as this. Yeah—people could reach even for the stars. And here was the answer to that.

It was more than ever fortunate that at least he had a plan to follow. Mixed with the choked sensation around his heart, was a dull gratitude that the metal of his ship, though wrought in lines that made it kindred to the universe, still had been mined on Earth.

He slammed the face-window of his oxygen helmet shut on its hinge, picked up a case of instruments, undogged an airtight door in the curved padded wall of his cabin. It was the inner portal of his exit airlock. In another moment he stepped forth, armored and seeming outwardly almost to belong here.

Threads of frigid mist coiled around him. The ground looked water-scored like a dry river bed. Gravel and dust were mixed with what must be layer on layer of fallen vegetation, for the ground gave under his tread like old felt. There were little holes in it that might have been burrows of some kind.

Ross had to be the trained scientist now. He looked at his aneroid barometer. It registered just over a pound and a half of airpressure as compared to the Earthly sea-level figure of fifteen pounds to the square inch.

His quick-registering thermometer, graduated to both Centigrade and Fahrenheit scales, showed fifty-eight below zero, F.—almost matching this high southern latitude, at the edge of the polar cap, which far overran the antarctic circle.

Next, pursuing other data, which he was supposed to and had been eager to obtain, he drew a ribbon of paper from

a small sealed cylinder and exposed it to the air. A segment of it, treated chemically in a certain way, browned slightly with oxidation. So there was more than a trace of oxygen here.

Another segment was blued by a hint of water-vapor. A third segment yellowed strongly under the effects of nitrogen. And a fourth was pinked by the acid action of carbon-dioxide. This atmosphere was much like that of Earth except for its poverty of oxygen. But it was far too thin for human lungs. A man would gasp and die in it in a minute.

There were hundreds of further tests to be made. Of wind-velocities, of the relative color-strengths of the sunlight, soil-composition, of everything. Not to mention the taking of thousands of photographs. And he had to prepare somehow, to live here. But he was too tense for any work.

He wanted to go back into his ship, which had become a little like a home to him during the months of the Journey—a refuge. But that was no good. He would have no rest.

Yet there was a vagueness in his mind—a sort of veil—a natural defense that dulled realization. Knowing this made prickles dart through his stomach and across his hide and up into his throat.

"If I ever understood *completely* that I'm here on Mars, that would be the end," he told himself. "It's inconceivable. I'd just wither up inside."

He started to walk, driven by strain. It could easily become panic-stricken running. The stillness seemed to close in around him like the deeper substance of his nostalgia. It was blunt, stony. It was part of his human heritage—just as the promise of a dream had been—and its frustration. The beauty of probing, reaching out. A kind of ecstasy it should have been—but wasn't.

Finding yourself too small and narrow to have what the technology of your own people could give you. Because the familiar was beautiful too—because it was needed peace. And out here in all

this difference it was impossible to have the peace you needed to know the charm.

Ross viewed his inner defeat with almost weary disinterest. Tension sucked away his strength. He supposed that, in a relaxed mood that could never happen here, the weird scene around him might also be beautiful. With its expanse of white and its tawny duns—its steely sky and its motion of withered whorls in tenuous wind.

But the pendant unknowns promised nothing familiar to rest in, away from eternal stumbling and alertness against the nameless that might mean anything that you could not foresee. It was like a quiet menace, perhaps not directly harmful to the body. But a steady passive grinding—with but one clear outcome.

He imagined time passing in a succession of Martian days, twenty-four-and-a-half hours long. Months . . . How soon would his cracking mind begin to people the landscape with—say—friendly daisies? How long would it be before other men came here to find his camp and—soon—the same primitive limitation? A thing common to the Earthborn, a locked circle, a treacherous trap that could do you to death, a split in human nature . . .

ROSS ambled on, drunkenly. Off to the left was the polar cap—endless but shallow, seeming less than a yard deep. The shadows of the rocks sticking through it were blue and long. Ahead lay the nearest clump of dry growths. Beyond it rose the ridge, or dyke, that hid the rounded formation—and the glint. But between him and those winter-deadened plants a white arm extended from the main mass of the cap, which was fifty yards away—a sort of peninsula . . .

Like a man smelling smoke in his house at night, Ross still needed to know things. So he plodded on to that white projection, and into it. Needles of hoarfrost broke like brittle fur around his knees. He looked at it, and then up

at the sky again, at the pearly haze that hung there against the steel-hard blue. The sun pinked that frigid murk a little, like clouds.

And then Ross saw something else. Somehow it produced in him a slow puzzlement and confusion in the way he felt. It was a phenomenon long suspected to belong to Mars. Half worried, he looked down at his armored arms and at his gloved palms. He glanced back at his boot-tracks in the frost. They looked like boot-tracks.

The thing that bothered him was the idea that what was happening to him now had happened to him many times before. Though this was Mars, where no other man had ever been.

But then, of course, he began to understand. He was up against a fact he had certainly known—one so simple that its implications had been elusive. You had to see to understand. He spread his palms again—and in spite of the cold atmosphere that no man could breathe, there beyond his armor-shell he began to be aware of the reawakening of a lost kind of warmth in him. It was timid and faint at first. But it began to crack the tautness of his nerves, to bring him shadows of humor and whimsy.

He remembered his kid-days with a sled. A crazy thought to have here. "You're a fool," he said aloud. He wasn't yet ready to smile. Too recently had he been in hell. But the process now started in him progressed like a retarded chain-reaction.

Ross began to see that the whorls of the fantastic plants ahead of him moved with a rhythm common to all treelike things when blown by the wind, that a little wisp of dust looked just like a wisp of dust—anywhere, proving how universal is physical law. As, of course,

he had really known all along.

By no means did Ross feel all right yet. But the jagged edge had been scraped from the newness. Now environmental charm might have a chance. Within him he began to feel facets of himself and of life—facets that had seemed for always incompatible—coming together, blending without conflict. Home and peace and distance and adventure.

He began to see that things could be as he had wanted them. Here he would work and study, and dig into mysteries. It would be wonderful.

He was eager for a closer look at those Martian plants and at the ridge beyond them—at all the thousands of other things, nearby or far beyond his present horizon.

But right now he set all of this aside for a more important subject, the thing that had begun his emancipation. He felt sheepish as if for a ridiculous error.

From the cold murk above him white flecks were drifting down slowly. They were tiny and dry but as they landed on his gloved hands he continued to marvel that they had the patterns of Earthly snowflakes. This had to be . . .

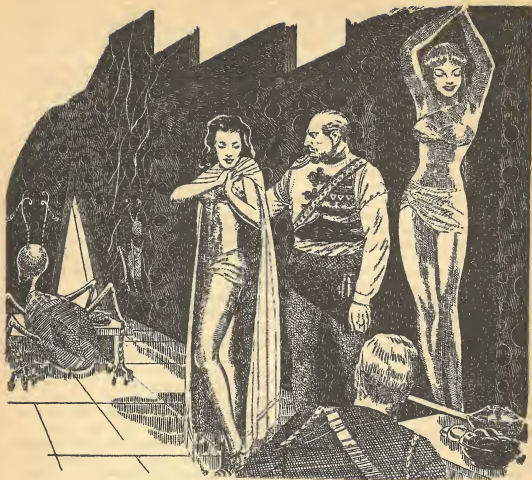
Out to the planets of the farthest stars natural laws, including those governing the crystallization of water, had to be the same. In his mind he walked again with Helen Collins on a university campus while fine snow sifted lightly on their shoulders. Even here he had that much of home. And people could have it much farther away.

"Everything's all right, Helen," he said. "And I'll be back."

For several minutes more he stood catching flakes. It was as though he were witnessing a humble miracle, that had given him and his kind the universe. . . .

NEXT ISSUE'S HEADLINERS

SON OF THE TREE, a short novel by Jack Vance—TEMPORARY
KEEPER, a novelet of a jet-polo star stranded on Mars, by
Horace B. Fyfe—and I PSI, a novelet of strange
Earthian experiments by Carter Sprague!



Feeling on the brink of disgrace, Seana slowly unzipped her cape

DECEPTION

By MATT LEE

*Pinup girls in three dimensions,
Stir up man's delights and tensions,
But when they're viewed on cosmic scale
Prove deadly to the hapless male!*

THE disaster occurred seconds after the alien spaceship flashed the record of its approach to Earth on the big radar-detector screen outside Denver. It happened so fast that nothing could be done about it.

For a frantic instant the astonished operator on duty thought that it must be one of those rare meteors which survive the flaming friction of the atmosphere and actually crash Earth's surface. The last scheduled space-ship was already safely bedded down for the night at the big mountain airport and the object moved far too rapidly to be any other sort of man-made vehicle or projectile.

Suddenly, right on the screen in front of him, it came to a halt—while still nearly ten miles up. The pip of light that marked its passage was briefly still. Then, against all rules of science and logic, it simply ceased to be.

The operator stared at his screen, scratched his head and tested the apparatus. Everything appeared to be working as it should. He wondered next if something were the matter with himself—a train of thought which his ego was quick to deny.

When nothing else untoward appeared on the screen, he shrugged the whole business off. The automatic tape recorder was on and the experts could decide what it was when they came on duty with the morning that still lay long hours ahead. He made a brief notation on the dictaphone of what he had seen and sent his thoughts winging back to that wriggly little brunette in Operations.

WHEN the day-shift came in, clear-eyed or otherwise according to its fashion, a subordinate noticed the entry on the dictaphone during a routine run-back. He checked the automatic tape recorder and was sufficiently puzzled to report it to Dr. Rivers, in charge of Detection at the Denver Port.

That worthy grunted and got back to his racing form as soon as he was once more alone in his office. He had long since decided that anyone under the age of forty-two was liable to see anything from flying dragons to click beetles when left alone at night with a radar-watch. Dr. Rivers was forty-three.

Three hours later Dr. Rivers was reminded of the odd report when word came in from a Forest Ranger station fifteen miles away in the Rockies as the helicopter flies. The Rangers had spotted some strange wreckage on their nice clean mountain and were anxious to have somebody get out there and clear it off.

This brought Professor Franz Reichman and Seana Ryan on the scene as rapidly as rocket flight could bring them from Berlin and Boston respectively. Dr. Reichman was beyond question the leading interplanetary biologist of Earth while Seana, behind her serene brown-and-blue-tinted harlequin glasses, was rated among the half dozen ablest chemical analysts in the Western Hemisphere.

Seana got there first. She was still staring in wonderment at the strange objects which had been brought to the big Denver space-laboratories from the mountains when the Herr Doktor walked in briskly, if a trifle unsteadily. She regarded him balefully.

"I am sorry, gnädige fraulein," he told her with a stiff little bow that all but deposited him upon his large flat proboscis. "Rocket landings always for me time to recover take. The motion—"

"Forget it, Doctor," she replied absently, refocusing her attention on the object on the long table in front of her. "What do you make of this? It certainly seems to be alien."

This was the one object which had survived the strange disaster in something like what must have been its original shape. It was unexpectedly light in weight as it was incredibly tough despite the delicacy of its design.

"Strange it is," said Dr. Reichman in his heavily-accented English. Seana, who was considerable of a linguist, took pity on him and began conversing in fluent German. The object, whatever it was, rated discussion between scientists in any language.

Its body—if it had a body—was roughly like an hour glass in shape, two

near-globes joined together by a slim waist with four delicate three-jointed legs attached, two on either side, to the larger. At the end of its smaller globe was a sort of beak and from its top sprayed a pair of curving antennae that were almost lyre-like in their symmetry. It was thirty-eight and six-tenths centimeters overall in length, stood twenty-three and five-sixteenths centimeters to the highest part of its antennae.

"*Donnerwetter!*" exploded Dr. Reichman in wonderment.

There were other fragments, of course, including pieces of an apparent mate to the strange artifact—if artifact it was. Bits of burned and blasted substance that might have come from some sort of a ship—crystallized fragments of high-powered machinery—some utterly mangled and much less pleasant charred fragments.

Three months later the decisions were made, following a series of exhaustive and, to Seana and Dr. Reichman, exhausting checks and analyses. Abetted by scientists in many other fields the two experts had come up with some astonishing but eminently sound results. Earth had unquestionably been approached by an alien ship for the first time in recorded history.

Tracers had been able to establish other records of the appearance of the doomed visitors from beyond space. Once they knew what to look for on their records, and when radar-detector tapes were found to have picked up its approach on a wide span. The alien ship had approached Earth from a wide orbit, had circled the planet three times before disaster overcame it and its occupants.

Thanks to these records the huge cybernetic machines at the University of Chicago were able to compute its flight-source—which was unquestionably the hitherto unvisited fourth satellite of Jupiter, Callisto. The factors involved in this computation were obscure to laymen but were irrefutable to science.

"Apparently these beings, whatever they may be," Seana told the United Nations Council in her report, "are without metal. They seem to have little need of it save for whatever miscalculation or disaster destroyed them. They create their artifacts from animal and vegetable substance which they seem to be able to reinforce molecularly to enormous strengths. It is a little like a super amber."

SHE went on to describe her findings, from them to reconstruct a probable picture of the level of culture and science on Callisto. It must be, she stated, a reasonably high civilization or a space-ship capable of reaching the atmosphere of Earth could not have been constructed. It was, in her opinion, definitely worth visiting.

Dr. Reichman backed her up. Apparently the strange amber bug, which alone had survived the smash-up, indicated culture of a very high level. Abetted by other scientists he suggested that Callisto must have a sort of insect-dominant species developed far beyond any of the insects of Earth.

As the big satellite had a diameter of 3,200 miles, more than that of the planet Mercury; it was not improbable that it had an atmosphere capable of supporting life of a high order. Its atmospheric density must be low or the creatures could not be so delicately made—a point to consider.

"Tell me, Professor," said one of the Council members, leaning forward, "why, if such a civilization exists on Callisto, no traces of it have been spotted by ships which have circled it."

Dr. Reichman shrugged. "It highly probable is," he said in his mangled English, "that such an insect culture might well underground live. Definitely they our ants resemble. They must each to its task conformist be. Such things definite are."

"If we consent to an expedition would you care to go?" the Chairman of the Council asked the two scientists.

Five weeks later Seana and Dr. Reichman landed on the vast Marsport Field on the first leg of their journey to Callisto. And that evening they were introduced to Space-Colonel Juan Martin, who had been assigned to pilot their expedition.

Seana's first reaction to the crack pilot-astrogator was one of relief that he was not handsome—in spite of the unexpectedly light-blond hair that contrasted with his swarthy Latin features. Then he spoke and she was not sure about his not being handsome. There was liquid passion in his soft accents. Then he smiled and her alarm bells set up an instant inner clamor.

"You are familiar with the purpose of this mission?" she asked him a trifle stiffly as he lounged comfortably in one of the big armchairs in the Marsport commandant's office.

"You want to crack Callisto—right?" he countered easily. "It's something I've been wanting to do for a long time myself—ever since Tacky Akyama went in there and was never heard of."

"We about that misfortune read have," said Dr. Reichman with a slight decibel drop which Seana had learned implied sympathy on the German scientist's part. He used it whenever he showed her pictures of his wife and nine children—which he did on an average of some five times per week.

"We roomed together at U.N. Academy," said Juan Martin quietly, a far-away look in his eyes.

"Aren't you rather young for a Space Colonel?" said Seana, wary of even an indirect emotional approach. "Not that I mean to be rude, of course, but—"

"But you are," said Colonel Martin with a smile that showed his teeth. "In this branch of the service we rise fast—if we live. And aren't you a little young yourself to be hiding behind those big spectacles and running around the System with test tube in hand? Not that I mean to be inquisitive, of course, but—"

"You will have a week to make final preparations." The Commandant broke

in hastily. To Seana the grizzled space-veteran looked on the rim of mirthful apoplexy and she didn't like him the better for his amusement.

HE ADDED, "Colonel Martin is the ablest and most experienced space-pilot available at this station at present. I feel certain that you will find him satisfactory."

"Thank you, sir," said Martin, rising. "If that will be all, sir?" When the Commandant nodded he saluted, bowed frigidly to Seana and Dr. Reichman, strode out. As he went he was humming an old twentieth-century folk tune entitled *Somebody Loves Me*.

"Well!" said Seana. And again, "Well!"

"You must remember that this is Mars, Miss Ryan," the Commandant told her gently. "Results count a lot more than protocol out here. And you'll find that Colonel Martin can deliver them."

"I hope so," said Seana dubiously. Then for a time she forgot about their impudent pilot-astrogator as they plunged into a highly technical discussion with the Commandant about what was going to be needed for their journey to Jupiter's fourth satellite.

She saw him several times during each day of the week that followed, of course. There were only the three of them going—and at that it was going to be crowded in the *Thetis III*. While the ship itself rose more than two hundred feet in the air, a slim silvery spire within its launching platform, only a scant thirty feet of its length was reserved for quarters. The rest went for engines and shields and storage space.

He was always courteous, always efficient—yet Seana received a definite impression that he was laughing at her beneath his carefully grave exterior. This did nothing to make her feel any more friendly toward him. Nor did the fact that Dr. Reichman seemed to have been won over quickly by his half-Latin charm.

FINALLY it was time to go aboard for takeoff. The sight of the two girls from the Marsport cabarets who came to the field to see Martin off made Seana first look down at her bulky space-coveralls and wish she had done something with her hair, which was carelessly skinned back to a bun on her neck. Then, contemptuously, she turned her attention to a needless final check of her equipment.

Colonel Martin was whistling softly through his even white teeth as he came aboard and pushed the airlock buttons that sealed them within the ship. In the crook of one arm was one of the absurd little statuettes, called *Ciro Girls*, which had long since replaced the pinups of an earlier age.

Colonel Martin placed it carefully in a padded niche built at the head of his bunk, before lying down and arranging his safety belts. Seana, across the cabin, regarded him with deeper contempt. She had heard that such men delighted in such sensual distortions of the human figure—female gender.

He caught her glance and grinned without shame. "Meet Sally Lou, Seana—the hottest little mascot this side of Luna. Whither I go, thither Sally Lou goest. Ain't she an asteroid queen?"

"I think she's vulgar," the girl burst out, then blushed.

Colonel Martin chuckled, enjoying her embarrassment. He said, "Tacky Akyama and I got them together. His had green eyelashes. I like my little redhead better."

"You know no woman ever looked like that," said Seana.

"Maybe so," Martin replied. "But I can dream, can't I?" He leered outrageously then asked the scientists if they were set. At their assent he pressed the button which activated the launching blasts. Seana felt wrenching pressure, unlike the gentle acceleration of the big space-liner that had brought her to Mars. For a little while she blacked out.

The journey was one long bicker be-

tween Martin and herself. When Juan wasn't disputing with them endlessly about the validity of their scientific estimates of conditions on and around Callisto, he and Seana were arguing about such varied and futile subjects as what was good taste and were astrogators more important than scientists. They fought about everything.

Being neither a fool nor uneducated Seana was by no means unaware of the deeper implications of their conflict. She had never permitted any man to occupy much non-professional space in her life and the idea of falling in love, especially with a space-adventurer like Juan, appalled her.

Even more appalling was the possibility that she might be falling in love with him while he could not possibly find her attractive. She began to remember more and more often the two lush sirens who had seen Juan off at Marsport.

She wondered what it would be like to concentrate upon being attractive to men—to one man in this instance. It could have its points, she decided, even though they were not scientific. And then she thought of her own powderless face, her plain hair and practical clothing, her utter non-practise in allure.

She began more and more to loathe Sally Lou as the embodiment of everything she had denied herself so scrupulously during her twenty-eight busy years. The little doll was almost obscene in its voluptuousness and frank sexual allure. She found herself actually considering tossing Sally Lou through the disposal vent.

But the stars moved past infinitesimally and at last the huge orb of Jupiter loomed larger and larger in their viewing plates. Juan spent more and more time at his complex banks of instruments and, scientist or not, Seana found herself admiring the deftness with which he handled them.

WHEN they began their first circle of the huge satellite, Dr. Reichman and Juan got into their first serious dis-

pute. It broke out when the German scientist insisted that Juan was making his approach far too slowly, was wasting both time and fuel.

"I tell you, Herr Kapitan," he expostulated, "that you no need of such precautions have. My reconstructions the atmospheric envelop far less dense to be show. I demand you them follow."

"Listen, Doc," said the astrogator easily, "you stick to your business and I'll stick to mine. We're circling this oversized Luna three times to cut velocity and that's that."

"He's right, Juan," Seana heard herself saying. "We checked every possibility and the construction of the artifact we've found proved it. I thought you fellows were brave."

"Oh, we are," said Juan with a mocking smile. "We're brave enough. But if we don't follow our best instincts we have a way of turning up dead—as do those for whom we are responsible."

"But it perfectly safe is," Dr. Reichman protested.

"You're probably right," Juan told him. "But just the same I'm orbiting three times for a slow landing. I've seen these foolproof scientific theories go haywire too many times."

"Now you're being insulting," snapped Seana, angry and disliking herself for allowing him to stir any emotion in her.

"Not this time," he replied calmly. "I know how Akyama planned to do it—and like most Japs he was a stickler for planning and sticking to his plans. He had satisfactory proof that a single-man ship with three-D walls and single-action struts could be brought in on one and a half orbits. He didn't make it."

"This is an Sp-R three-man rocket with seven-E walls and triple-action strutting. We're going to make three orbits and play it reasonably safe. What do we know about Callisto anyway?"

"You're impossible," snapped Seana but she turned away and went back to her bunk and lay down. She could hear Dr. Reichman arguing with Juan but to

no avail. Juan was a stubborn space-mule, she thought, as the hum of the rockets caused her to fall asleep. Yet somewhere, deep within herself, she was glad for his extra care.

The scientists' first surprise came at the beginning of their third orbit when Juan called their attention to certain of his dials. When Dr. Reichman saw them and read them he looked at Juan, then at Seana, pathetic in his bewilderment.

"All right," said Seana to Juan. "Go ahead and crow."

"I'm not crowing," the spaceman told them. "I'm just glad I figured it right. Callisto has virtually the same atmosphere as Earth and a good two thirds of its gravity."

"It isn't possible!" muttered Dr. Reichman in German. "It simply isn't possible." He moved back toward the storage rooms, shaking his head in bewilderment, and looked at the replica of the strange Callistan artifact they had brought along with them.

"Maybe it isn't possible," said Seana, "but it's so." For the first time she felt a warming toward Juan with which exasperation was not intermixed. He had come through where they had not—and they owed their lives to his well developed space-instincts.

"Thanks, Juan," she said simply.

He looked at her speculatively. "You know," he told her, "if you'd get rid of about nine tenths of those things you call clothes and use a little make-up like human girls I think you'd be something approaching a dish. Remind me to remind you later on."

"Perhaps, in about forty years," she told him bluntly, then fled to her bunk, wondering why in hades they had to fight all the time. He could at least have received her olive branch in kind.

It was two days later, Earth time, when they landed on the big moon of Jupiter. Juan had spotted what was evidently a spaceport of some kind and, while he could detect no signals of any kind, managed to land the *Thetis III* without any untoward incident.

After two hours of further tests they went outside together. There was little point in any of them remaining in the ship for safety. Juan was the only member of the party who could use a blaster effectively so he had to go along. And without him neither of the others could hope to pilot the *Thetis III*. It was all—or nothing at all.

Seana felt a sudden inner sinking at sight of the strange buglike creatures that came toward them in considerable numbers. They might have been monstrous spiders on four alien legs, walking backward with their stubby antennae waving reedlike in the air. They were, she judged, between five and six feet long and stood approximately a yard high to their antenna tips.

"They don't look much like that thing in the ship," Juan told her. Seana, who found herself hugging his arm, moved quickly away, ashamed of her weakness.

"Look!" cried the Professor in German. "They're dressed!"

IT WAS an era-shattering discovery. In all those portions of the Solar System which had been thus far explored—Mars, Venus and the twilight strip of Mercury—no intelligent forms of life had been turned up. Mars had had it once, of course—but so long ago that few traces of its once-great culture remained, even for the avid archeologists. Man, so far, was the one thinking creature.

And now—here was life, strange but definitely thinking and creating artifacts that enabled it to soften its environment. Seana felt a deep thrill run through her as she studied their hosts, who came forward and stood in a semicircle around the Earth-trio.

The creatures seemed to be a sort of buff color naturally. They wore over their legs and bodies some sort of greenish-brown coverall which left their sightless rear-end heads and antennae alone unclothed. They did not seem frightened, only alert.

"How can we communicate?" Seana

asked Dr. Reichman.

The Professor shook his shaggy head helplessly. But Juan, who had been looking at the inanimate things as well as at the creatures around them, moved toward a long transparent amber-tinted cigar-shaped device perhaps an eighth of a mile away.

A portion of the buglike beings moved along with him. He waved a salute at them and, to Seana's amazement, received a group antenna-wave in reply. He grinned and yelled at Dr. Reichman and herself that a look at their machinery might give them a clue.

However, it worked the other way around. Not until three of the creatures' apparent leaders had been admitted to the *Thetis III* was the intercommunications dam broken. It came about when they waved inquiring feelers at the radar equipment. Juan turned it on to demonstrate it and at once all three Earth-folk were deluged with thoughts from the Callistans.

"They're living radar machines!" cried Seana. The Callistans regarded her in perplexity and Dr. Reichman, who had said little thus far, finally put in his oar.

"You are right, Seana," he said in German. "They do not see or hear but they are sensitive to vibrations even though they cannot translate them into sound. Herr Colonel, the transmitter."

Amazingly it worked. And while there are necessary semantics of thought which caused some confusion at first, they proved not a tenth as binding as the semantics of human speech and were quickly overcome. The Callistans at once wished to know who they were.

"We are from the third planet—known as Earth," said Seana. To her surprise this drew thoughts of incredulity and disbelief.

"But we *are*!" she protested, giving their names and the name of the ship. She had a sudden inspiration, went back to the storeroom and procured the replica of the bug, showed it to them.

The thoughts that followed revealed

something like consternation among the Callistans. As best they could Seana and Dr. Reichman explained how they had come by it. But confusion continued to reign among their exotic hosts.

"They say," Juan finally managed to explain to his two companions, "that we cannot come from the third planet known as Earth to us and to them as Clard'u—or something like that. They have seen what Clard'u-folk look like and we aren't it at all."

"I like *that*!" snapped Seana, baffled. "Tell them they don't look like that replica of ours either."

"I think," said Dr. Reichman, frowning as he concentrated, "that I begin to understand. They are telling me something." He lapsed into English to add, "This not exact is but of them. a distortion is—no, not distortion but idealization more."

"For the love of Pete!" Juan exploded. He rose quickly and disappeared into the sleeping room next door. A moment later he was back bearing Sally Lou, who looked more offensively and aggressively a sex-image than ever.

To Seana's amazement there was immediate response from the Callistans. Shortly afterward one of their alien hosts, who had departed briefly, returned bearing a replica of Sally Lou—this one with green eyelashes. This, their hosts announced, was what the inhabitants of planet three, known as Clard'u, were like.

SEANA looked at Juan with sympathy. "Juan . . ." she began.

"It's all right," he told her quickly. "They're giving me the story now. Tacky seems to have crashed and burned—only this doll of his was thrown clear."

"Ach! Now I to understand begin," said Dr. Reichman with an excited gesture. "These—Callistans the doll saw and people like that were they thought."

"Sure," said Juan. "It clears up their crash. They are walking radar machines with no knowledge of vision or hearing. All of their senses seem to be concen-

trated in those antennae of theirs. They got an idea about the doll and somehow figured where Tacky came from originally—how we can't guess yet."

"And then they built a ship to get there," said Seana in her own excited turn. "Poor things! They tried to calculate Earth from a *Ciro* girl. I told you these dolls were unlike anything human. Look at the—the—er—lung capacity." She blushed but went on with, "To them it implied an atmosphere much less dense."

"Ja," cried the professor, again in his native tongue, "and when they thought they had reached the surface they were still ten miles up—and the density crushed them like flies. What a pity that they did not have a more accurate basis for their calculations. A *Ciro* girl! *Pah!* Now in Dresden we make a type of doll—"

"That would have made them think we came from Jupiter," interposed Juan unexpectedly in excellent German. He had not revealed a knowledge of the language during the trip. Catching Seana's open-mouthed stare he winked at her, brash as ever. Without his saying a word she understood that he had hid his knowledge of German because he found the Professor an old bore. She thought of the fat dolls of Dresden and fought to repress a giggle.

"Furthermore," Juan went on, suddenly serious, "we built our expedition on just as flimsy a base. Remember, by their own admission, this spider thing you people found in Denver is as far from reality as my Sally Lou. Apparently it's a sort of Callistan *Ciro* girl. I trust you can follow the full implications of this—"

"Shut up, Juan!" snapped Seana. "We're not utterly stupid. It means we have discovered another species which has near-human traits in spite of its difference in appearance and senses. If these creatures glorify themselves as we do it means—"

"It means crazy," said Dr. Reichman in German. "It means that they are in-

sane. How can they glorify their species when they have but one sex. Surely you can see that."

"Narcissus," said Seana and, directing the thought at their hosts, she was warmed by their approving agreement. And then she discovered that the attentions of the Callistans were focused entirely upon her, to the exclusion of the two men.

Apparently, thanks to their incredible antennae, they had discovered her to be female. As the bearer of children she seemed to them the dominant species. The men were insignificant. So frank were their thoughts that she glanced half-fearfully at Juan.

"I hope you're not hurt," she said hesitantly.

"No, just terribly terribly angry," he replied with a grin that seemed to pull the heart right out of her. "As a matter of fact they're right. I always prefer to go out with girls rather than men."

"Shut up!" she said half-angrily and reflected that the two words were coming to play an increasingly large role in her vocabulary. She got herself back into focus on the job at hand.

The Callistans were rather wonderful—even by their own admission. They did live largely underground—a fact which caused Dr. Reichman to feel somewhat better—and they had only recently mastered the principles of flight.

They did not use metal—another feather in the Tyrolean cap of the German scientist—but relied upon a type of large and lazy domesticated animal which transformed its vegetable diet into a sort of amber fluid as Earth cows transfer theirs into milk. It could be made more or less strong by variations in the beasts' diet. Everything, from clothing to food to furniture to space-ships, was made from some form of this fluid.

"Incredible!" Dr. Reichman murmured. "But practical too." He expressed a desire to see some of these animals, was told he could after the welcoming banquet that evening.

This, according to the thought-messages their hosts transmitted through the radar screen, was already promising to be the most notable social event in the big satellite's history. The matter of communications arose and Juan offered to move one of the spare screens and transmitters out of the ship into the banquet hall, so that the two alien species could continue to converse.

He was gone several hours and Seana found herself disturbed by his absence. That, she thought, as she wandered around the *Thetis III*, was the trap in the propinquity of such a close-quarters space-trip as the three of them had just completed. It was a trap and a delusion. And now Juan had blithely left her to play with his radar machines. She was being unreasonable and she knew it and disliked herself for it—but she couldn't help it.

WHEN Juan came back he was carrying a curious amber-colored parcel and something in the look he gave her caused her to regard him with wariness. He handed her the package, saying, "They've come through with a costume of honor they want you to wear at the banquet. Remember, you're the queen bee to them—so live up to it."

Seana accepted it and conveyed a message of thanks when she got back in the control room with its adjacent radar screen and transmitter. In return she received pleased thoughts from the Callistans. Now that Juan was back she found herself almost liking them. She smiled and went back into the sleeping room to change her things.

She decided she might as well go as whole-hog as the facilities aboard would permit. She allowed herself the luxury of a sponge bath and even dug out the self-wave set for her hair. When it had been on the allotted ten minutes she combed it out. The effect, in the steel wall-mirror, was unexpectedly flattering. Her long tresses, glowing auburn in tint thanks to the self-wave, rolled in slow waves to the white nacre of her

bare shoulders.

Then she looked at the costume the Callistans had created for her—and gasped. It simply wasn't there. Surely they didn't expect her to appear in those little bits of fabric! She held them, one in each hand, and felt herself blush all over.

Something rolled out onto the floor and she stooped to pick it up. It was a very Earthly combination powder box and lipstick. Juan, she decided, must have had it in one of his pockets and added it for good luck. She regarded it defiantly.

Then, shivering in panic, she got into the "dress." It barely covered the vital and salient portions of her hitherto well-concealed but opulent figure. It was, in short, an exact copy of the tiny little scraps of cloth the *Ciro* girls wore.

Worse, because the Callistans had no eyes and therefore no sense of color. It was the buff material that seemed to be universal on the huge satellite. It felt soft and smooth, almost like her own skin. Worse, it *looked* like her own skin.

But she was going to have to wear it. She gritted her teeth and pulled a long raincape from her locker and donned it and buttoned it up. When she emerged she was pretty well covered. Juan looked at her face and shook his head, a new light in his eyes.

"Either you're wearing lipstick or I've been around you so long you're beginning to look good," he told her.

"Probably both," she snapped. She had to wait alone with the Callistans while the men went back to spruce up for the banquet. She wondered what they were going to have to eat and drink.

When Juan emerged Seana didn't even notice Dr. Reichman's one-piece dinner suit or the impressive splash of ribbons and decorations across his massive breast. She had eyes only for Juan. It was the first time she had seen him in his full-dress blues.

His startlingly blond hair gleamed golden in the soft light of Callisto at

eventide and the silver brocade of his insignia on collar, shoulder and cuff gave him the decorative romance of a Napoleonic hussar. She thought he was too handsome and didn't care.

They were taken through a vast gateway in the side of a low hill. Since the Callistans had no eyes they lived without light—but Juan had managed to rig up an impromptu electric system for the occasion. Dr. Reichman complimented him on it.

"Those antennae of theirs may be handy," he told the German scientist, "but sometimes you need eyes. They'd never have crashed on Earth if they'd been able to see. They were tuned for a certain atmospheric density and when they reached it they stopped—and went in but good."

They passed through a long subterranean avenue lined with orderly Callistans, whose antennae waved like reeds in the wind as the Earth-folk went by. Finally they reached a long domed hall in which long amber strips, a foot above the floor served as tables. In niches along the wall were heroic distortions of Callistans—styled like that which had survived their crash—and at the end of the big chamber, in a special niche, stood a huge reproduction of a *Ciro* girl. Seana was ushered to a spot just beneath it.

"Take off that Mother Hubbard!" Juan whispered.

"I—I can't," the girl replied, blushing.

"You've got to—don't tell me the costume they made you is that bad," Juan insisted. "Forget your vanity and show it."

"But they can't see," Seana protested vigorously.

"Maybe they can't but they can read any shape within half a kilometer with those antennae of theirs—and read it more accurately than we can see it," Dr. Reichman told her sternly.

"I don't want them reading mine," wailed the girl but she knew she was defeated. Feeling herself on the brink

of everlasting disgrace she slowly unzipped the rain-cape. Impatiently Dr. Reichman took over, almost peeled it from her.

"Saints alive!" cried Juan, jumping as though someone had stuck a pin in him. "It can't be!"

A waving of antennae throughout the room denoted the approval of their hosts and the three Earthlings sat down at the low tables. Juan gave vent to something that sounded like a long low whistle. *It was* a long low whistle.

Leaning toward her he whispered, "I thought you said that no woman ever looked like that." He jerked his head toward the immense *Cirol* girl in the niche above them.

"I'm a distortion," said Seana in anguish. "How could I have hoped to have a career unless I kept it hidden?"

"You're the kind of distortion men have been dreaming about for thousands of years," Juan told her. Then, thoughtfully, "It depends on the sort of career you want."

"Have you anything in mind?" she asked him with a brazenness that would have shocked her five minutes earlier.

"Oh—several," he told her. "You can take your pick."

"Skin and bones," Dr. Reichman muttered in German as he prodded the strange food which appeared through a trap door in the table in front of him. "Skin and bones. Now in Dresden . . ."

THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

hundreds of millions already subsisting upon short rations, and nothing is being done to correct this condition.

If anyone reading this holds himself to be free of institutions, let him consider a few of those which enclose him. First, of course, is the family, the hoariest institution of them all. Then come school, community, church, job and country. These involve distinct sets of loyalties, some of which are bound to conflict.

We are not attacking any of these loyalties as such. Each in itself is essential to growth in the world we know today. Each in itself is admirable. Yet the believer in an institutionalized code of ethics, who finds himself forced into unethical behavior through loyalty to parent or employer, is en route to ulcers, the psychiatrist's couch or the looney bin. And this is but one of hundreds of potential conflicts of institutional loyalty.

So what is he to do? First, of course, he must grow up—no easy task. He must recognize his institutional loyalties for what they are—but tresses to support his road to maturity. He must see them as imperfect man-made devices, reared for specific purposes, instead of fiat from some cumulus power in the sky.

Maturity attained, he must decide which loyalties to discard in pursuit of the one loyalty he can afford—loyalty to his mature self. For in the long run each of us is alone in this uni-

verse, and in every recognized religion only the mature can truly serve God and man. We must be ever willing to stand behind, beside or in the van of our fellows—but only through loyalty to ourselves can we offer true loyalty to others.

Fundamentally this involves following the simplest of all credos—the Golden Rule. Which is just about the only rule a mature person can follow anyway. And until we get a lot more of him successful human achievement of either the planets or the stars is going to be more of a catastrophe than a blessing. Institutions, like toys, must pretty generally be left behind us once they have served their purpose.

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

FROM this end of tackling the epistles, it would appear that we are going to have us a lively, provocative and at times controversial gumbate. We only hope the same feeling remains when we reach the other end. So let's at it. First—

LENGTHY SCREED

by Algis Budrys

Dear Editor: A screed of some length this time, on one or two subjects connected less with the December TWS than they are with the interests of Science-Fiction as an organized body. First, however, an apology.

If you remember, I recently authored a somewhat juvenile letter to one of your magazines anent "Journey for Seven" by John D. MacDonald. I thought I had him well pocketed on a certain aspect of his hypothesis. Was I wrong! The worst of it is that all I did was skim over one paragraph in the story, and compounded the sin by not checking back before I put my foot in the bucket. I hereby APOLOGIZE in capital letters, my face a beautiful mixture of red and green, somewhat like a Coca-Cola sign.

As an aside, is John D. MacDonald actually Raymond F. Jones? Because if JDM is actually RFJ, then JDM is also H. Beam Piper and that explains a cryptic remark by John Campbell some four years ago when a rash fan asked him if H. Beam Piper was a pen name. The Pundit shifted his eyes uneasily, twitched an eyebrow, and said, quote, "No," unquote.

About the December issue: It seemed to be uniformly mediocre except for one part of "The New Reality". Walt Sheldon, however, no matter who he is, should either stick to his superb air stories or else begin writing Science-Fiction. This last could just as easily have taken place in an ATC transport. And what tempted you to publish that thing by Mack Reynolds? How many times has that story been published? Forty? Four hundred?

"The New Reality" struck me as a typical Harness product, in that it left too much of the characterization and detail work to the reader. I don't particularly care for Harness' preoccupation with the "Darker Than You Think" theme, either, though that's not a valid criticism.

The thing that struck me though, was whether or not the historical facts presented to establish the main hypothesis could be disproved by the use of equally well documented facts to the contrary. A pi value of 3.00 struck me as rather intriguing though a circle with a diameter exactly one third of the circumference would be a circle only in the fourth dimension, if there.

But I'm wasting space. There follows a direct transcription of a wire recording I recently was sent by Curt Michaels, an old associate of mine who is now in parts far removed. It was originally intended for an article in a fan magazine, but it is my contention that any article published in that frenetic medium is as good as dead as far as coming to the attention of anyone in a position to act on it goes. (If I ever write another sentence like that I intend to cut my throat.) So here goes.

"Fans and Fandom in general have long been working for a day when Science-Fiction would be recognized as the significant literary field that it is. Most of us remember the days when there was very little glamour in it and we were crackpots rather than progressive thinkers and budding geniuses.

"Science-Fiction Editors and writers have done even more. I imagine the days of Xeno, of the "Happy Genius," "The Flying Freak" and such stalwarts as Anthony Rogers, Tubby and Hallmeyer are not too far behind them. In those days you just said you edited pulp magazines and squirmed out of it if people asked, "What kind?"

"Since the middle nineteen-thirties, when it first began to show signs of its possibilities, Science-Fiction has been carefully written for an ever larger audience. The fans and editors knew that eventually the day would come when Science-Fiction books would be reviewed in leading literary publications, when the names of Science-Fiction authors would be known to more than just a few.

"The day has come.

"Some seven or eight new Science-Fiction magazines

are already on the market. Ten more are scheduled, ranging from reprints to obvious copies of well established magazines. Not three of these maintain the standard of their predecessors. And the market is still growing.

"What will happen when it is as great as that for Detective or Western pulps? Will every rag, no matter how abysmal in quality, no matter how slipshod its science, find a ready audience? Already there are signs of it.

"Will we have True Science-Fiction magazines? Science-Love Stories? Expose Galactic Cases? Science-Movie Stories? Will Science-Fiction comic strips pepper our newspapers? Will there be One Man's Planetoid soap operas? Is this what all of us, in some measure, worked for?

"Despite the best efforts of publicity agents, publishers, and motion picture producers the truly outstanding work in the detective-mystery medium is rare. With only two readily recalled exceptions, "Naked City" and "Detective Story," no dramatic Detective story has recently been favored by the critics.

"Nor has one outstanding novel with a crime background been written since, perhaps, Tiffany Thayer's "One Woman," which was recently turned into a banal and maudering motion picture. The same for Westerns and, to bring in the third great pulp medium, the sports story. They are not judged as literature or drama, but as one of a distinct class of literature or drama, with the implication that they can never hope to compete with straight fiction.

"Is that going to happen to Science-Fiction? "Rocketship XM certainly looked like it. It smelled to high heaven. It stigmatized the whole cycle before it was even on the way. Forrest Ackerman's carefully planned campaign in the prozines didn't help much either.

"The Science-Fiction field has something to offer the public that Crime, Westerns, and Sports never did. Modern Science-Fiction is educational. That's a frightening word to most retailers of fiction these days but it's true.

"Because it conveys new theories in all fields of human knowledge, it teaches. It develops an attitude of mind which is apparent in any gathering of fans, in any discussion by them of any subject, with the possible exception of sex and beer.

"Consequently, it would be almost tragic if Science-Fiction degenerated to the point the Westerns and Detective stories have reached.

"We live in a time when every written word must be carefully considered in order not to offend the church, the state, the political party, the capitalists, the communists, the atheists, the big-endians and the little-endians. McCarran bills, indexes, Daily Worker blacklists, Watch and Ward societies, lobbies and Senator McCarthy haunt us all to some extent.

"Science-Fiction is one of the few media where the only thing you have to fear is a letter from an indignant fan. For that reason it must be kept away from the ray-guns, the glass-helmets-for-the-boys, but let-the-naked-girls-breathe-vacuum artists, the fly-by-night publishers, the hack writers with no integrity and less awareness of what Science-Fiction really is."

Well, that's Curt Michaels' somewhat dramatic opinion. I agree with him. What do you think?

Extraneous note to the harpies who make up mail-lists for "Book Bargains" and the like—save yourselves the postage. The only people I'm interested in hearing from are fans and old friends. That goes particularly for that toad Degler, York, Crispin, or whatever he calls

himself these days.—220 Shorewood Drive, Great Neck, Long Island, New York.

You and your friend Curt Michaels have certainly come up with that most proverbial of catering jobs—food for thought, Algis. Naturally we have indulged over recent years in considerable of what passes for thought with our reasonably unhumble self anent the same subject—namely, science fiction, whither away?

As long as we can keep both h'es in whither science fiction is going to be all right. It is going to scare the whey out of its fondest admirers from time to time of course. Recent failures among some of the spate of new magazines in the field are not encouraging on the face of it. And the so-called stf "boom" still remains more a subject of fan conversation than an actuality.

But as long as there is any uncertainty in the stf future it is still on its way. Certainly it offers far more range and scope for writer operations than the now virtually frozen detective-mystery field, now playing out its string in a half dozen dead end streets.

As for the specialization Mr. Michaels fears, we doubt that it will come from the desires of any reader groups—for stf readers by and large seem to like a widely varied diet of their favorite fare. Of course there are exceptions, all of which seem to write letters of protest to this column when we print a.) anything faintly resembling pure fantasy, b.) anything which contains deeper flights of pseudo-science, c.) a space opera or d.) anything by Ray Bradbury, Edmund Hamilton, Leigh Brackett, L. Sprague de Camp, Charles L. Harness, Henry Kuttner, Murray Leinster, Raymond Z. Gallun, A. E. van Vogt, Margaret St. Clair, Raymond F. Jones, Wallace West, Carter Sprague, Cleve Cartmill, Frank Belknap Long, Arthur C. Clarke, Matt Lee, William F. Temple, Fredric Brown, Eric Frank Russell, Mack Reynolds, Walt Sheldon, Clifford D. Simak, etc. Some of them don't like humor either.

Our own desire to explore all facets of the field as fully as possible and our one cross in life seems to be an epidemic tendency on the part of our authors all to gallop off in the same direction at once. This we are constantly battling with only fair success. But we're still in there pitching—or taking—Al and Curt.

IN MEMORIAM?

by William F. Temple

Dear Editor: As literary executor of the late Mr. Arthur C. Clarke, I feel it my duty to put on record

that he met his end honorably in the cause of science and science-fiction.

When he read Mr. R. R. Smith's letter in the current TWS refuting the Clarke thesis that the human body would not explode in a vacuum, he couldn't contain himself until he had demonstrated the truth of his theory by entering a vacuum chamber. Unfortunately, after he had entered the vacuum chamber he still couldn't contain himself. When his thesis proved wrong he went all to pieces.

As Secretary of the British Interplanetary Society, he had expressed a wish to be buried on the Moon. Your readers will be glad to learn that this last wish will be carried out. It is regretted that more cannot be effected, but when they came to put Humpty Dumpty together again, his friends found, as they had long suspected, that Mr. Clarke was not all there.—7 Elm Road, Wembley, Middlesex, England.

We only wish the happily alive and undisintegrated Mr. Clarke would write us some more stories and cease toying with such fripperies as the British Interplanetary Society, scientific studies and research and the like. And the same goes for his obituarist (or is it elogist, Bill?) Herr Temple. It looks to us like a thoroughly dastardly plot to slay Mr. R. R. Smith via the laughter role.

INDEFINITELY OURS

by Paul Anderson

Dear Editor: Since quite a few writers seem to be contributing epistles to your magazines I might as well put in mine. Let's start it with a request. Please, please print letters on a certain issue in the issue following.

I know that all letters aren't in by the time an issue goes to press but those of interested readers who have a good argument to carry on will be. Good discussions are impossible with a four-month time lag. When this sees print, if it does, I'll have forgotten what was in it.

When any possible ripostes are printed eight months will have gone by from this writing and I'll probably have changed my mind about the subjects discussed. To be sure, verbal battles can be carried on by personal correspondence but that doesn't give the other readers a chance to follow the contest and get in their own licks.

Nuff said. The December TWS was a really fine job. My somewhat envious compliments to all the authors represented. But I have a bone to pick with Mr. Harness.

"The New Reality" was a darn good job of writing and I'm glad you printed it. But that maybe-the-cosmos-is-as-it-is-because-we-think-it-is always gets my philosophical hackles up. Have at ye, Charles!

First, this matter of destroying the photon. Now if a photon were somehow destroyed it wouldn't mean the collapse of the Einsteinian universe. The spacetime characteristics of a universe depend on, among other things, the total amount of mass in it. Removal of some of this mass would alter things very slightly—would, perhaps, imperceptibly increase the diameter of the universe. Perlod.

Then, as to how the photon was destroyed—Mr. Harness' version of the idealized Einstein-Ehrenfest experiment was most ingenious and I'd like to see it done.

Not pretending to more than a somewhat superficial knowledge of quantum theory and wave mechanics I don't know what would happen in that case.

But my guess is that the photon would simply go in one direction or the other, obeying the usual law of random of sub-atomic "particles." If you sent a good many photons through the apparatus one at a time, some would go in one direction and some in the other and the statistical distribution would come out the same as if you had sent them all at once.

But of course I've got no business speaking of the photon as a particle. In transmission at least it seems to act as a wave. In that case, perhaps on entering the apparatus it would "break up" into two quanta of equal energy.

Frankly I don't know what would happen, and I'd very much appreciate an authoritative statement. It's the author's right of course to assume that destruction occurred—after all, nobody's ever done the experiment. But scientifically, not science-fictionally speaking, I doubt very much whether the quantum would go out of existence. And I suspect a man as well-grounded as Mr. Harness does too.

Oh, well. We were going to discuss subjectivist philosophy, weren't we? That maybe the universe is what it is because people believe it is.

One common-sense objection immediately arises. Why does a new theory ever get started? Let us say that Galileo alone believes that all bodies fall with the same acceleration. So he tries the Leaning Tower experiment before a fair-sized and unsympathetic audience.

Now we know that the weights did fall as Galileo predicted. We also know that his official witnesses didn't believe they would—in fact a lot of them wouldn't believe it even after they'd seen it. So—how could one man alter physical laws against the opposed beliefs of many?

In short, a theory contrary to the accepted one would never get a chance to prove itself because the opposed majority of minds will always make the new theory false.

It is also stated that new facts follow new theories. I beg to differ. A new scientific theory always arises to explain facts which will not fit into the pattern of the old one. What earthly reason would anyone have to create a new theory if the earlier model explained everything?

It is true that a good theory will predict facts we do not yet know, facts which we can then proceed to find experimentally since we know what to look for. But the basis of the revised theory is always an attempt to fit observed data into a pattern which the old explanation cannot possibly be stretched to cover.

For instance, if the Ptolemaic system was literally true, why did its original beautiful simplicity have to be modified and remodified and complicated with cycles and epicycles and epicycles until Alfonso of Spain remarked that if he had been around at the Creation he could have given the Creator some good advice?

It was not because astronomers loved complication. They hate it—I know! It was because they had to elaborate more and more in order to account for increasingly accurate data on the basis of an originally faulty hypothesis. Ultimately Occam's Razor brought the whole structure down.

Mr. Harness asks how brilliant and honest man such as Aristotle could have overlooked things that are obvious to us today, such as the equal acceleration of falling bodies. The answer is simple—they didn't look. They weren't interested. Mere experiment was something that no good Greek philosopher would soil his

hands with, since the senses are liars anyway and truth is only to be found within our own heads.

Similarly the Babylonians, though careful empirical watchers of the stars, had no use for mathematical theory—a value of 3.00 for pi was good enough for their purposes. And any number of ordinary people, sailors and dock wall-poppers and kids lounging around the wharfs, must have noticed that a ship's hull goes out of sight before its masts do without bothering to ask themselves why. Nor would an early philosopher have wondered over so trivial a phenomenon.

If he "explained" it at all it would be on the basis of some or other optical property of the eye. It wasn't till somebody thought of tying in this simple observation with a number of other observations that the round-earth theory was developed. Now if the earth had been flat before, all these data never would have existed—ships' masts would disappear first and so on—so what basis would there be for believing in a spherical earth?

Naturally mistakes were made: Mr. Harness cites a number. But what of it? What are they but just that—mistakes? I disproved the conservation of energy once in sophomore physics lab. But they haven't given me any Nobel Prize yet.

Enough of that. This letter has got so long that I can only touch on the philosophical aspects of subjectivism and one could write a book on the subject. As a fairly good party-line logical empiricist (we're the Bolsheviks of philosophy—we believe primarily in an analytic approach to all statements) I maintain that such concepts as Kant's ultimate and inherently unknowable Ding an Sich are factually empty—neither true nor false, but meaningless.

For if you say, "This x is by its very nature forever undetectable by any means whatsoever, direct or indirect, though pure reason tells me it must exist," you have by your very statement excluded any possibility of scientific checking on the existence or nonexistence of x. It does not affect us in any way whatsoever nor can it ever do so.

By the same token we cannot prove that it does not exist as we could prove that phlogiston, say, does not exist (by scientific experiment and inference). So the whole thing is just a meaningless noise. It makes about as much sense as saying, "Ixionation of the phrangistan leads to fantangling of the dreelsprail," without defining your terms.

Not that I sneer at Kant. He was one of history's great men. But he made his mistakes the same as everyone else.

What, after all, is final reality? We know we have certain experiences—that's a primary fact, not changed by hanging any subjectivist label on it. We also know certain principles of logic in which we believe since they have never failed us. (Pure logic and mathematics belong to the class of tautologies and are factually empty. I am speaking of applied logic and mathematics, which make meaningful statements.)

All our knowledge is subject to a greater or lesser degree of uncertainty and no one pretends we know everything. But we have a fairly self-consistent picture of what we do know, a pattern in which theory and experience agree quite well on the whole.

And while it is true, as Russell and others have pointed out, that solipsism cannot be refuted on a basis of pure logic—still, the existence of an objective reality independent of man is such a highly probable inference that no sane person rejects it. I am sure Mr. Harness does not. He had his fun, and made a fine story out of it. But in practice—

I could go on indefinitely. Simply explaining the

orthodox positivistic view would take volumes, to say nothing of Haemi's refinements, which I do not pretend fully to understand, or the views of opposing schools. But I've already sounded off at too great a length, mostly in the hope of getting some arguments started. Let's get some really good duels under way, huh? Pistols for two and brandy for one!—3423 Aldrich Avenue North, Minneapolis 12, Minnesota.

And now you've had *your* fun too, Paul—although the so-called “razor” of your fourteenth-century amigo, Occam, was actually stated earlier by Duns Scotus, we believe. As to the nature of reality—well, no matter how many volumes are written anent it, we doubt greatly that its nature—whatever that may be—will be altered one whit.

Unless, of course, the publications of such volumes, either through the conversion of rags, woodpulp etc. into paper on such a scale, or the possibility of such speculation affecting the actuality itself, might do something to reality—but then we seem to be falling into the same trap you have. And in this particular instance we believe Mr. Harness was the most entertaining of the three of us.

UGH!

by Mary Wallace Corby

Dear Editor: This has been simmering in me for a long time and now I must let off steam. I first was introduced to your magazines back in the Sergeant Saturn days, and my reaction was, “Ugh!”. They have improved tremendously since then.

But something I cannot understand is the adulation of two of your authors. The first is L. Ron Hubbard. Mr. Hubbard is a prolific writer but prolific is not synonymous with great. Recently I read a story by Mr. Hubbard in one of your competitors and it was the most absolute tripe I have ever read.

It was not a story but a tract dripping with almost pathological hatred of unions, unionists, foreigners and psychiatrists, plus a profound contempt for women. He has had stories in your mags that were not much better. This is the writer acclaimed as one of the greats of science-fiction. Why? and how?

The admiration accorded Ray Bradbury is at least understandable. He is a polished craftsman whose stories are marred only by their adolescent viewpoint. Mr. Bradbury is not merely preoccupied with death, he is obsessed by it. This is a strictly adolescent characteristic.

Who among us has not written poems on the order of “When I am dead and over me the slow thin rain shall fall—” or “Six feet underneath the earth how sweet ‘t would be to lie—”? This is strictly teen stuff and should be outgrown as one matures.

Mr. Bradbury, I understand, is well past his teens. The majority of your readers, apparently, are not, so they adore Mr. Bradbury and all his writings. So, as I say their adulation is understandable, if misplaced. It is not enough for Mr. Bradbury to be a superb stylist. So is T. S. Eliot and an anti-Semite to boot. Mr. Bradbury is a distorted idealist but his mature readers deserve better from him. We are not all in our teens.

Before I close I should like to congratulate you on the tremendous improvement in your mags. since I first saw them. You are doing a much better job than your predecessors.—55 Taylor Ave., East Keansburg, New Jersey.

We never wrote no pomes like that, Mary. Such jingles as we composed in our adolescence were more directly concerned with those subjects bookdealers list invariably under *curiosa & erotica* than with death. But then, as a writer, we have yet to be compared with Bradbury, so life has its little compensations, wot?

L. Ron Hubbard is a good professional writer, one who seldom produces an unsound job and occasionally comes up with a story far above average. However, thanks to his work in dianetics he has written little of late—nor does he seem likely to for a goodly while. Which is our loss if your reprieve.

Thanks for the kind remarks anent our work at this stand. And drop us another line whenever the spirit moves you—please.

HAGGIS HAGGLE

by Raymond Wallace

Dear Editor: This by way of letting you know that J. T. Oliver in his December letter had the right idea about how the letter columns are read—and J. O. Curtis has the right idea about what to do with the space. It was only your response to Oliver which caused me to read the letters at all, or at any rate the short ones and the first and last paragraphs of the others, and it was mostly time wasted. Is anyone but yourself really interested in what the readers think of the stories? Incidentally, Margaret St. Clair's contribution was superb—the others were up to your usual standard.

If you are determined to print letters, perhaps I can ask women why they appeal to each other to know what fascinates or inspires men. One young married woman's letter lists a number of housewifely duties which she says are “a lot in itself to inspire said Homosapiens to great and noble deeds. Granted, women?”

No doubt the women grant it, but do the men? If she had just stopped with “a lot,” no one could quibble, but I shall have to haggle a bit about the inspiration. It does not inspire me to have my meals cooked on time—it doesn't even interest me. As for washing and mending, the laundry does it better than most wives. I should prefer to find other forms of inspiration in a wife.

It will be apparent, of course, that I am not married, as I should not dare to write like this if I were. Just why I am not, is a bit of a mystery, as a man who is short, chubby, bespectacled and pedantic is very fascinating to women, eh, men?—1799 Euclid Avenue, Berkeley 9, California.

Cheer up, Raymond, old ram, your sheep will come in some sweet day—or would come home to roost be a more apt expression? In view of the tone of your epistle we favor it.

DOWN WITH THE ONLY TANGIBLE!

by Lynn Stanley Cheney

Dear Editor: After a lapse of many years, I feel compelled once more to express myself concerning one of your stories. The New Reality by Charles L. Harness is the object which attracts these thoughts to spill across my page. I feel that congratulations are in order to Mr. Harness for a well-handled job on the most complex subject in the Universe—reality.

His philosophical implications were well received and heartily digested by this reader and student of Philosophy. It is logically stated that the most elusive reality existing is reality itself. The structure of the Real has constantly intrigued the mind of Man from the dim beginnings, causing an endless turmoil and upheaval of thought-reaction. However, the confusion is a necessary ingredient for progress, for in harmony there would be no discord and friction is the force which sparks achievement.

The ending of the story would have pleased the late Sigmund Freud. That distinguished advocate of the sex motive in Life would have been happy to find his theories still in effect in the New Reality, which brings into view the implication left in my mind by the ending that science and art (hence progress) are only outlets or substitutes for Man's inability to attain a zenith of fulfillment in Love (life as it should be lived). Hence it could be said that Love is the only tangible in a maze of intangibles, not only the new and old realities, but the only reality—Eastern New Mexico University, Portales, New Mexico.

We hereby declare a down-with-love campaign in favor of quiz shows, collecting match-box covers, suddenly-appearing ineradicable black rings in guest-room bath tubs and xylophone players, especially Ardian Rollini.

ADAM'S BAVES

by Bob Hoshins

Dear Lemmy: One theme is springing up more and more today. It seems to have become a favorite topic for discussion in story form. Two months ago Eric Frank Russell flopped in his attempt. But Charles L. Harness has written a truly memorable piece in his "The New Reality." It seems that no matter what Harness turns to he can write something to make stantasy history.

But another thing is the basis of this letter. In short, is Jack Vance actually Henry Kuttner?!! If you want I'll quote my source of information. In fact, I'll quote it whether you want it or not. 'Tis "The Best Science Fiction Stories 1950," published by Fell. I don't have the exact page reference but it is in the short biographical sketch given in the back of the book.—Lyons Falls, New York.

No, Bob, as we stated in the March, 1951, SS, Jack Vance is not a pen name for Kuttner or anyone else save Jack Vance. We have been in correspondence with him and, during the war, with his mother for some eight or nine years now, have seen his pictures, run his autobiographical sketch, to say nothing of his

stories. During that time we have seen quite a lot of HK personally and can state authoritatively that he is not JK.

If you really would like to do some detective work, try ferreting out the real identity of C. H. Liddell, whose *The Odyssey of Yiggarr Throlg* is such a delight in the issue of SS mentioned above. We know (we found out only by accident) and do not intend to tell.

THE O'SLANT

by Walter A. Willis

Dear Editor: Congratulations on getting another great story out of Harness! "The New Reality" is the best thing in your magazine since "Flight into Yesterday" and that's saying something—though I'm not sure just what. It was one of those very rare stories that keep you turning over the pages to make sure you aren't too near the end. Stimulating!

You have a lot of bad stories but by ghod, when you do have a good one it is good. I don't know whether van Vogt and Harness are my two favorite authors or just one but as long as they turn out stories like this I don't care. "The New Reality" had its faults of course. I have a suspicion it was cut at the beginning—not by you, I trust (I still haven't forgiven you for making van Vogt simplify one of his yarns—imagine! simplifying van Vogt—it's like watering wine) and of course it descended from genius to mere cleverness at the end.

These cute twists on the Book of Genesis were all very well when they started but nowadays we run screaming when we come across a hero labeled Adam. And there were enough new ideas in "The New Reality" to dispense with the old mythology. One of them, I noticed, was a bit like one I suggested once in SIANT for a new twist in time-travel yarns. That since the universe must contain the exact number of particles to have warped it out of hyperspace the effect of sending even one of them back in time would be to destroy our closed universe as we know it. And of course the particle sent back could be the one that brought the universe to critical mass in the first place. A large and very vicious circle.

In comparison with the Harness story the rest ranged from mediocre to mediocre. Reynolds was quite neat. La Brackett almost parodied her attractive self. Russell wasn't up to his usual standard. No, the second best thing in the issue was your own little review of "Destination Moon" and "Rocketship XM." That was, as we say, a good spake and very pleased I was to see it. I was beginning to think that Hollywood was subsidizing the prozines. Somebody will have to if there get to be many more of them.—170 Upper Newtonards Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Faith, and so it's a critic we are findin' ourselves to be! We'd never have belaved it possible. No, it was Harness himself who did the manicuring job on *The New Reality*, which was originally submitted with the title, *The Integers*—somewhat cryptic, wot, Walter? As for that vV novel in question, we didn't ask for simplification but for clarification, which it needed,

and which is a very different thing. Here's hoping you like more than one story in our next.

TINCUP

by Joseph A. Phipps

Dear Sir: Please publish this "begging" letter in TRS and earn my sincere gratitude. If you don't I'll hex you, so help me. I am a desperate man, I am. Due to currency restrictions it is impossible to subscribe to any American publications—therefore sf fans in the British West Indies, like myself, find it almost impossible to obtain magazines except as gifts.

Will any of your readers be willing to exchange sf magazines for stamps, postcards etc. of the West Indies? I promise to answer all letters. Newspapers and info regarding our history and culture, etc., will be gladly sent to anyone interested.—c/o Simplex Time Recorder Co., Eastern Main Road, Laventille, Trinidad, British West Indies.

Let us know how you come out, Joseph. And lay off that hex. Incidentally, we scarcely wonder that anyone employed by a "time recorder company" should be a science fiction addict. Sounds fascinating indeed!

BUNDLES (OR RATHER PARCELS) OF THANKS

by Bernie O'Gorman

Dear Ed: This is once again from your Irish South African. I am writing to thank you for publishing my recent letter requesting mags from your readers. I have just received the issue with my letter in it from one of the great number of readers who answered my appeal so promptly. Through the medium of your mag I should like to thank them one and all for their generosity. Those who have as yet not received a letter from me will have one very soon.

I should like however to thank especially those who send parcels of mags without a return address and whom I cannot thank personally. I am still way behind on my answers to all those who have written but they will all be answered eventually. At this distance from you I don't suppose I'll become one of your regular correspondents but I'll write when I can.—Box #432, Bloemfontein, Union of South Africa.

Drop us a line whenever you can, Bernie. And we hope your science fiction needs continue to be amply satisfied.

ANN BE QUICK

by Ann B. Nelson

To the Editor: I think it's been about a year now since my letter captioned "She No Know Her Mutton" saw print. Some wrote me what they believed to be your real name but I see there is still some controversy. It's heck to be practically in love with a guy and not know what to call him—but I'll bottle up curiosity with a "policy is policy" sort of thing and let her go, Joe.

At the newsstand were heaps of stf mags—from seven to ten copies of each—and I searched for a solid quarter hour before finally emerging with the one remaining copy of the December TWS. A warm glow of satisfaction broke over me as I anticipated your wonderful letter section. I loved every one of those fourteen pages and wrote J. O. Curtis a "what-for"—without cussing either.

Well, little by little and especially in the larger cities of the North, John Q. Public is shedding his race prejudices and looking for intelligence and soul qualities first. So there is some hope that someday he will stop all this quibbling about the "female mind" which incidentally often manages to occupy a wholly masculine body. That, I would say, is the sex consciousness to get rid of. There are women, as everyone knows, with more or less intelligence and soul qualities. Are you looking, Lin?

I penned a note to Jim Blish on a postal card—a wrist-slap—probably what he expected, that parapsychology deals with something even more natural than physical form. I won't write a book to prove it. Someday it will reveal itself if those interested continue to pursue it.

Cona and Jick weren't so bad—I thought we had lots of fun together. Robert Marlow's "tizzy" paragraph—whee! Sorta got you? I'm still laughing. Probably some of the VIP's of Houston U. have contacted Ed Lacy—how could he miss 'em?

Maybe sometime when you can get to it, we'll have a good serpent-race story—mmmmmm!—225 East Huron, Chicago, Illinois.

Guess we'll have to skip giving you our name and send you our telephone number, Ann—or perhaps you'd better send us a photograph first—and not of the Field Museum, please. Yes, we really and actually and definitely think women are people too. Dunno about the serpent-race story—though we don't see why not if anyone can come up with a doog'un. Don't wait a year to write again—and perhaps some of these new chlorophyll derivatives will prevent your "warm glow" breaking over you without future hygienic casualties.

HUB-TWO-STICKS JOE

by Joe Gibson

Dear Ed: Well, there it is. Proof. That you gotta build a fire under 'em to know they exist. Miss Hesler of Humberstone frankly admits that if I hadn't said Bradbury was becoming science-fiction's Milton Berle, the way he was stealing stuff, she wouldn't have joined in on TRS. If I said the charm Mr. B has as a writer is akin to being sole owner of Port Radium, we probably wouldn't have heard a peep out of her.

Therefore, I present one big lie—if Bradbury ever breaks a leg, I shall be happy to shoot him. We will now have lots of letters. Ye ed can pick the best therefrom and present a meaty TRS and nobody will have reason to say the column should be kicked out in favor of an additional short story.

But let us gleefully set about kicking that editorial around, Lem. So the gals are a good influence on science-fiction. True. No argument. Stf is no longer a field of specialized interests. It is now—or rather it

had darned sure better become—a field of general interests. And women are back-fence specialists in general interests.

Uh-huh. Now look at it the other way—what influence is science-fiction going to have on females?

Indeed, sir, the prospects are most startling! Here is a group of the Opposite Sex who are stepping down off their pedestal—and onto the necks of some of the males who put 'em there—to join in this auspicious project. The general public has become interested in science-fiction and for good reason: While many of us old fans have considered stf some sort've educational medium between grade-school comic books and Institutes of Technology, the general public has sensed the true fact that in stf we have an enjoyable means of stretching the imagination.

In a fast-moving technological civilization, with new gadgets popping up every minute, a broad and tolerant imagination is a prime essential. The public has learned that fantastic is merely a word today for something that happens tomorrow. The public has learned just how narrow and undeveloped its imagination is. Science-fiction can cure that painlessly. That is, if science-fiction can be made painless to the general public. The gals have sensed this instinctively. Their instinct tells 'em they're needed here. And when instinct moves a woman man is a puny thing.

But do you perceive the consequences of this? Here, gentlemen, is a group of females who are standing up to express their ideas! It is not a group of females whom we can judge simply by the hang of their skirts!

This practically amounts to a social revolution. We males will have to judge these females much as we judge ourselves—according to individual trustworthiness! We shall be forced to condemn an untrustworthy female—who knows whether she has shapey knees or not? And this, in turn, will completely upset women's attitude toward life. No longer will the untrustworthy female be able to get away with murder—as she has, thanks to our method of judging females—but will be given the same condemnation we mete out to untrustworthy males. Think what this will mean!

The rest of the gals, the trustworthy ones, will no longer be plagued with the injustice of their lot. They will no longer suffer in helpless rage as the bad 'uns push them around with men's ignorant approval. This psychological force will no longer prompt women to malicious gossip as the only means of asserting themselves. This temptation to be suspicious, constantly on the defense, will be gone.

Women will no longer have to accept the idea that all's fair in love and war. Being slightly familiar with the latter, I know that if you double-cross a buddy in combat you're begging for a very real hole in the head, so I suspect that old proverb is somewhat faulty and not conducive to good living. Cads, man, this is world-shaking!

We can stop preaching to our little daughters that they must model themselves after that sweet nice little Shirley up the street and start helping them be their own good selves. And the gals will know that priceless camaraderie of being "one of the gang" that has henceforth been the reserved privilege of us swag-garing males. Undoubtedly the gals will buckle a swash in their own right.

No more cramming defenseless flesh into tyrannical foundation garments on the misbegotten premise that romance means sex appeal a la Hollywood. This moonlight-and-roses stuff takes care of itself much more readily when the constituents involved are relaxed. And

womankind has been anything but. The sweet talk and pretty manners will go out and the guys and gals will consider more frankly such matters as being able to live with one another after the honeymoon's over.

Who knows? The two sexes might even learn how to argue with one another!

And to think it all started in science-fiction. . . .

Since you and Mort Palay are going into a "How many angels are pinheads?" discussion of the rights and wrongs of inductive and deductive processes of thinking, I shall offer you a bone to gnaw on. First, flatly stating that individualists use inductive thinking is like flatly stating that atheists aren't religious. Second, since Mort must argue rights and wrongs, consider this—when an individualist is wrong, he's more likely to hurt only himself and no one else, while a conformist who's wrong—being one of a group—is more likely to hurt others as well as himself. Hmmm?—24 Kensington Ave., Jersey City 4, N.J.

Are you kidding us, Joe, or are you and/or ourselves caught in a time-trap or something? Egads! Scotch your stockings, bind your bosoms, up with the hemlines and down with the waistslines and on with the cootie garages. Has you read *Replenishing Jessica* or *The Great Gatsby* or *Wife of the Centaur* or *Children of the Ritz*? Hot stuff, all of them. If we can find them we'll send you our collection of old speak-easy cards, Joe. Maybe for you they'd still work.

Modern youth—*aaah!*

WE THOUGHT BOP WAS DEAD TOO

by Tom Paca

Dear Whatever: Been a long time, hasn't it? Been busy, trying to acquire an education. I'm just about to give up on it.

So you're Lem Mutton now, eh? Well, well, I still think you're our boy Sammy, but let it pass, let it pass. . . . I notice the last year and a half hasn't diminished your store of acid wit, you should pardon the expression, and thank Sigler for that. . . . same old shaggy-man stories, same old bitter attitude toward the peasants. Bravo! Where's Brooklyn, anyway?

Now you're even writing Abe Burroughs-type song titles. . . . by the way, have you heard the Burroughs-type revision of *Come Where My Love Lies Dreaming* . . . or, *My Sweetheart Carries Her Mattress on Her Back*?

Glad to see Mike Wigodski, the bitter genius of Houston, is still in the fold. But recent developments in Western music, Mike? Being a lowbrow, I assume you mean bop. . . . Well, George Shearing, Les Paul, Buddi Satan and suchlike do some nice "modern" stuff. . . . personally, I'm still catching up to Stephen Foster. And have you heard this new stuff they are playing down in New Orleans? What would James Bowie say?

I have met pinpoint angels, Mike! Thereby hangs another tale. . . .

I saw both Rocketship XM and Destination Moon. . . . I loved the latter and regurgitated over the former. I don't give XM even the little credit that the Coles did. Aside from a general Flash Gordon atmosphere, poor rocketry and worse physics, there wasn't too much wrong with it except maybe senior play acting. . . . but Destination Moon, I believe, has opened the door for

some good, intelligent Stf movies. Without Brooklyn and Texas comics.

X-M did take a fair to middling swing at sex. I sure felt sorry for Lloyd Bridges. But I didn't go for that passionate pink the Cole family liked . . . I don't like passionate pink colored anything, (my girl friend is a brunette) and all my friends looked green to me for hours. They usually do, of course.

Sex gets us around to this teapot hurricane we seem to have brew'n (brewed? Come, now!) in TWS . . . are we just getting around to the discovery that women are here to stay? Of course, it took Stf some twenty-years of unchaperoned couples charging around the universe to get a pregnant heroine into a story, which is a new record or else demonstrates the vast advances of science. But just how were we going to go about the business of colonization, anyway? Generations have to be generated somehow (direct current, no doubt).

The girls are here to stay (Cod, what a trite phrase!), and it is a pretty natural state of affairs, I think. When we say "modern woman" in these discussions, though, let us exclude the "feminist" type of calculating witch who demands equality and uses the two oldest weapons known (Words are the other) to attain, not equality but advantage. The type of woman George O. Smith typified in his Sandra Drake. She isn't modern. Older than Amber, in fact.

Most women, though, rank up there among the nicer things in life, along with Florida, hunting, reading Hemingway, flying, Scotch, steak and shrimp, cold beer on a hot day, reading Bradbury and/or Kuttner-Moore (to balance the Hemingway), the swamps at dawn, rain at night, Paul-type (or Reinhardt) records, Bonestell colors, Calculus, Kirchwasser and the absolute luxury and non-necessity of reading Sigler. Viva la Femme, if you'll pardon my bedroom French.

We did have some fiction in this issue, eh? I liked the Brackett yarn—same smooth bloody Brackett-type stuff as her Lorelei Of The Red Mist—which, if anyone remembers as I do, was also pretty sexy.

More, maestro (thank you, Mr. Durante).

The rest was good solid Stf and that is praise enough. No genius but who except Tom Wolfe and Mike Wigodski have genius . . . ? But good intellectually decent fiction.

More Bradbury. I'll bet you get awfully tired of hearing that.

Not that it matters to many people but I approve heartily of fans like Jean Bogert, the uninhibited left-hander. (And what left-hander isn't uninhibited? I once knew a southpaw first sacker who was so sensitive on this subject that he insisted on wearing a right-hand scoop—caught and threw with the same hand, scoop and all. The left hand? He used that to keep tally on the errors. Top that shaggy-ballplayer story.)

But keep writing, Bogert. And I disagree, also, that anyone shows brains in marrying a nitwit—who shows brains in marrying, yet? (With exceptions, Coles and Entekins . . . with exceptions!)

Who says lycanthropy has declined in America? Ever date a U. of Miami co-ed? (With exception, Young 'Un, with exceptions!)

Listen, where do you get this crack about " . . . can usually find something if we hunt hard enough—even in Shakespeare . . ." Or do I misunderstand you? I grant you Shaw (Bernard, that is, not Irwin.) But even an engineering school English department couldn't hit Hamlet for me. Nor Lear nor MacBeth, though the weather 'got somewhat heavy outside during that . . .

By the way, I notice that your literary Elsa Maxwells

in criticism landed heavily on Uncle Ernie's "Across The River And Into The Trees." Ho, quoth this Indian. Ten years from now they'll rave about it. Liked it, me. What did they expect, another "Farewell To Arms"? It is—but twenty-odd years older and tougher and sadder.

Until we get together over that brandy-and-soda one of us is going to buy the other someday, this is about all. Saluda, whoever the hell you are.—Box 403, Georgia Tech, Atlanta.

Yeah, we can top it. We wrote a baseball novelet once whose pitcher hero fell afoul of a she-astrologer. She happened to hit one nail on the head and sold him. One of her predictions was that he would have arm trouble in August. So he began to write his own charts when the manager got her to lay off for the sake of his career.

Then a teammate crossed up the stars with a sensational play and he had to cast charts for the entire squad. And then a forecast was affected by the play of the opposition and he had to cast them. Finally even the umpires got into the act and he formulated their charts. Of course his arm went bad in August—the poor so-and-so had writer's cramp. Okay? The yarn was actually reprinted not long ago, so it couldn't have been *too* shaggy.

We have yet to read Hemingway's tree book yet—too busy catching up with reprints of Doc Smith et cetera for the book review columns. But when we do we shall probably find ourselves with the mixed reactions which Arthur Ernest usually inspires—except in *To Have and Have Not*, which we liked without qualification although nobody else seems to have.

If your comment on UoF co-eds is reliable you sound like a candidate for residence in Dogpatch.

CLIPPING JOINT

by Derek Pickles

Dear Editor: Firstly I must thank you for the writeup you gave the Clippings Service I'm running in the July issue of your companion magazine "Startling Stories." So far it's not a tremendous business but I get quite a lot of enquiries and a small percentage join and so far I've had no complaints whatever—rather the other way around, compliments on the stuff I send.

I'm now starting another service, a research service for fans and students, where for a small fee I will obtain complete details and a typed copy of any reference that is obtainable over here. I have done this several times for odd correspondents and all have been very pleased with the results.

Last week I received the Dec., 1950, issue of TWS and must comment upon it.

Cover—a la Bergey, usual, except no grappling with a BEM.

"The Citadel of Lost Ages"—Miss Brackett is still enthralled by the mixture of superior races who dash

around on horses waving swords at all and sundry. After a time I found it rather boring, as I've read a story with a very similar treatment someplace before but she (Miss Brackett) has a nice style and lots of action!

"The New Reality"—Mr. Harness has a good idea, which as far as I'm concerned doesn't quite come off. Even though I read the ending twice I couldn't follow the train of thought.

"Captain Famine"—nice new idea and well written but why must all the women be beautiful. Quite a large percentage of the women in the world are definitely NOT beautiful.

"The Everlasting Food"—Can't understand why this was in the issue at all, for it's only the old love triangle story dressed up with a lot of jargon about KETS and SANEDRIN.

"MacHinery"—At last one of those rarities, a genuinely funny SF story. I enjoyed every word of it.

"The Spark"—Neat, short and creditable? I think so.

"Chore for a Spaceman"—Definitely good. At last a story NOT written from the viewpoint of the heroic pilot but from the poor unsung member of the crew whose nearest approach to celestial navigation has probably been through the Sunday Supplements.

"If You Don't Watch Out"—Nice, very nice story, with a terrific atmosphere and the ending is worthy of the mag it's in.

"Bluff Play"—There was so much double-crossing, and mystery about this story that the effect it had on me was to leave me completely bewildered as to who was who. And as for the reasoning that if you have high cheekbones you're a Slav and therefore a reasonable suspect for being an agent of a foreign power, I refute such a prejudiced viewpoint. As a point of interest I always understood the Amerindians had high cheekbones but one doesn't suspect them of trotting around spying.

Your features are up to the usual high standard but I'm sorry to see that you forego the listing of fanzines, for the simple fact that the addresses were always very useful.

I refrain from attempting to list what I consider the best stories in this issue for I'm not presumptuous enough to believe that I can speak for any section of fandom's taste, so I merely say I enjoyed the issue. It wasn't outstanding but it was up to your high standards.

I enclose a rather illegible sheet about the new British Fanzine I'm starting yclept "Phantasmagoria" for your Fan Section. Also as an item of news Ken Slater is at the moment in hospital. We hope not for anything serious.—41 Compton Street, Dudley Hill, Bradford, Yorkshire, England.

All right, Derek, so the Amerindians had and have high cheekbones. Since they came from Mongolia, why not? And if you never heard of Indian spies—well, it's high time you got acquainted with our Western magazines. You'll find such occasionally there—sandwiched in between the rustlers and the nesters on the far side of the gulch, just a half mile as the vulture flies from the breakdown chuck wagon. Thanks for the Phantasmagoria promotion stuff.

Looks int'restin'.

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WHO LET PHILLIPS IN?

by Jo Ann Bernhard

Dear Editor: Thanks for publishing my letter. I have received letters from so many nice people that I would never have known of if you had not printed it!

Now for TWS. I just had to write again and say that I think the magazine is getting better and better.

Bradbury is still my favorite author but I like Rog Phillips stories too.

I wonder if any one could let me know where I can get a copy of "So Shall Ye Reap." I've looked and looked but still can't find my copy.

Don't ever stop publishing such a swell mag.—1338 W. Lullwood, San Antonio, Texas.

We'll try not to but why drag Rog Phillips into this? We owe him for at least one luncheon and do not wish to be reminded of same until he gives us a chance to repay it. Are you there, Rog—and are you hungry? You've got us on *So Shall Ye Reap*. How about some help, you assiduous readers, you?

WE MEAN IT, NEVER FEAR

by Tom Covington

Dear Editor: Do you really mean it?! Really! After all these years of begging! Say yes. Oh, please say yes! Please. What's that? Oh; what? Why that statement you made in answer to friend Searles letter of course. The one about our having some changes in covers about the first of the year. Please tell me that you meant it. Please!

All the stories that I've read in this December issue are good except for one which I won't comment on. The lead novel, being written by Brackett, was swell and most of the other stories were better. Eric Frank Russell's *MACHINERY* was especially good. 'Tis really great to see some humor in your usually-serious zine.

In Charles Harness' *THE NEW REALITY* you latched on to some understandable science fiction. 'Twas a welcome change from the Van Vogt's-more-scientific type story which constitutes most of the really scientific science fiction today.

In *SS* someone—I believe it was Shelby Vick—brought up a topic which merits a feud but which will probably be overlooked because of the race discussion that's going on in the letter column of that magazine. TWS at the moment doesn't have a feud going on—since you wound the women-versus-men thing up so nicely—so I thought I'd restate Shelby's statement and say that I agree:

Shelby, I believe, said that fem fen were ugly. And there's the basis of your feud.

But notice I said "basis." I want to expand the scope of the thing a little. It has long been my theory that 90%, if not all, science fiction fen have something wrong with them. Something which, to a certain extent, keeps them from an active social life. Ugliness is just one of the things. Others are inferiority complexes, ill health, economic factors, skininess, fatness, extreme shortness and height and other things which would cause people to withdraw somewhat from "the crowd" and seek enjoyment in a type of literature where contact with others is mainly by mail and they would not feel "out of place" or inferior because the rest were in the same or equivalent circumstances.

There, I've said it. I believe that some fen share my beliefs and will side with me. Others might not have made the observations I have and will disagree. Others may not want to admit that there's something wrong with them. Then, I guess, there'll be the guy who takes opposite sides and believes that he's right. He may be for all I know. I haven't too much on which to base my theory and may well be wrong. In fact I could be telling myself that there is something wrong with every other fan just to rationalize my own shortcomings. I could be trying to cover up for my inferiority complex and general withdrawal from social life. Who knows?

Well, I guess this is the longest letter I've ever written to a prozine so I'll shut up now. I realize that I haven't criticized a blame thing this time but I beg forgiveness. I'm not trying to "apple polish" you either so that you'll give my zine, *BIZARRE*, a good deal. *BIZARRE*, I firmly believe, is already one of the best zines out and can take care of itself when it chances to come before an editor's eyes.

Thanks for printing letters from authors. I like to get their addresses so I can worry them about doing introductions of themselves for *BIZARRE*. The first issue hooked Mack Reynolds, who has really been very cooperative about the thing. It makes me proud to think that such a well-known author would let his introduction appear in my zine—315 Dawson Street, Wilmington, North Carolina.

As you doubtless know by now, we *did* mean it about cover changes—there will be more and other (we hope) improvements as we cook them up and get them into print. Ever onward and upward TWS—and SS, of course. Your remarks anent fendom are intriguing. We believe them applicable, if at all, chiefly to the younger fans. With maturity fandom becomes one of the most complete cross-sections we have yet encountered.

What's this about our being "usually serious?" Well, since 1945, SS has printed tales like *ARE YOU THERE, CHARLIE?* by Ford Smith, *THE SOMA RACKS* by Margaret St. Clair, *SUPER WHOST* by St. Clair, *ALEPH SUB ONE* by ditto, *GUARANTEED* by E. Everett Evans, *HARD LUCK DIGGINGS* by Jack Vance, *PERFECT SERVANT* by Walt Sheldon, *WHAT MAD UNIVERSE* by Fredric Brown, *SANITORIS SHORT-CUT* by Vance, *RING AROUND THE REDHEAD* by John D. MacDonald, *THE UNSPEAKABLE McINCH* by Vance, *THE SUB-STANDARD SARDINES* by Vance, *THE HOWLING BOUNDERS* by Vance, *THE SACRED MARTIAN PIG* by St. Clair, *THE KING OF THIEVES* by Jack Vance, *SUMMER WEAR* by L. Sprague de Camp, *THE SPA OF THE STARS* by Vance, *COSMIC HOTFOOT* by Vance, *EXIT LINE* by Matt Lee, *PARDON MY IRON NERVES* by Edmond Hamilton and *THE ODYSSEY OF YIGGAR THROLG* by C. H. Liddell, to name a few.

Scanning the contents pages of TWS over the same period (Winter, 1945, to date) we discover I GET OFF HERE by Ford Smith, BABY FACE by Henry Kuttner, DEVILS FROM DARKONIA by Jerry Shelton, JONES' PHYSIQUE by Wilm Carver, THE GOOD EGG by Ross Rocklynne, THE GHOSTS OF MELVIN PYE by L. Sprague de Camp, PARDON MY MISTAKE by Fletcher Pratt, LIFE ON THE MOON by Alexander Samalman, JUKE BOX by Woodrow Wilson Smith, SKIT-TREE PLANET by Murray Leinster, THE RELUCTANT SHAMAN by L. Sprague de Camp, DONKEYS TO BALD PATE by Samuel Mines, JERRY IS A MAN by Robert A. Heinlein, EXIT THE PROFESSOR by Henry Kuttner, THE IRRITATED PEOPLE by Ray Bradbury, THE DOBRIDUST by St. Clair, PILE OF TROUBLE by Kuttner, A DOG'S LIFE by George O. Smith, MAN'S JOURNEY TO THE STARS by Dr. Amadeus Rafferty, CONSULATE by William Tenn, THE METAL LARK by St. Clair, THE ROTOHOUSE by St. Clair, MIRACLE TOWN by William F. Temple, REVERSE ENGLISH by John S. Carroll, THE COSMIC JACKPOT by GOSmith, A HORSE ON ME by Benj. Miller, MONSTERS FROM THE WEST by Miller, THE HIMALAYCHALET by St. Clair, ON THE HOUSE by Miller, THE CONCRETE MIXER by Bradbury, ALL GOOD BEMS by Fredric Brown, SEE YOU LATER by Kuttner, THE LIFE-WORK OF PROFESSOR MUNTZ by Leinster, THE NEO-GEODUCK by St. Clair, COLD WAR by Kuttner, PARADOX by Edwin James, SKIN DUPE by William Morrison, THE VOICE OF THE LOBSTER by Kuttner, SPECTATOR SPORT by MacDonald, THE STRANGEST BEDFELLOWS by Morrison, AS YOU WERE by Kuttner and MACHINERY by Eric Frank Russell. Oh yes, and by all means let us not forget THE HIBITED MAN by de Camp.

WHY DID IWOR GO ... ?

by Don Jacobson

Dear Editor: Business first and pleasure later, so I will dissect the stories first and finish up on TRS. The New Reality is one of the best to appear in TWS in many a moon. Charles L. Harness is a writer who is capable of coming up with some new ideas and concepts. I still remember with pleasure Flight into Yesterday and Fruits of the Agathon. His writing is always thoughtful, scientific and entertaining. I find him the equal of Heinlein and Van Vogt. Don't lose him.

Second and also good is Machinery. I got some real laughs out of it. As you stated, true humor is hard [Turn page]



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to find, but you have printed some nice items. Re Kuttner's Hogbens. I find them entertaining, but they strike me as being a takeoff on Bradbury's Homecoming.

Brackett and Cartmill, always competent, share third and Reynolds gets fifth, followed by TRS, the editorial, and the book review. Gallun's characters and plot are implausible, and the like of Sheldon's and Long's efforts can be found in any SF mag.

St. Clair ought to go back and read (or rewrite) Twenty-seven Captured Suns. You haven't printed such hack since Ray Cummings left the fold. Oona and Jick were and are juvenile soap opera and this opus is just as bad. Good SF isn't written by stirring up a couple of aliens, a talisman, and another planet and dishing it out with a lot of pretty adjectives.

Why did Iwor go with Issa? He didn't have enough character to be interested in anything. Why should Issa want him? She is immortal and has eternity to carry out her plans for her son. What use does she have for a blundering incompetent? Yet it is Iwor on whom the plot (if any) rises and falls. She foresees the coming of Dick and Megan, she can heal their hurts, can grant Dick immortality.

In the space of a couple of days she learns more about the key than the Saneidin, who have had it for thousands of years, and yet she cannot see that Iwor will make trouble when immortality is denied him. When he does she is unable to stop him. Send her back to the whodunits. Implausibility goes over better there.

Your editorial is interesting as usual but I disagree with some of your conclusions. Moore, Hull and Brackett have received considerable acclaim but why for the others on your list. I am a prolific reader but I have come across Judith Merrill's name only on one short story, an anthology (of other author's stories) and a soap opera book in a science fiction setting. Why the big rep?

Asimov has said a mouthful. Some fan writes in and says, "I have read two issues of your mag. McHack's last story was a great, terrific, supercolossal classic. It was better than anything Merritt, Kuttner, or Heinlein has ever done." Pfah!

Orban has some very good illos in this issue. I especially liked the symbolical one for the New Reality although the lady's posterior is somewhat misshapen. Astarita is much improved. I like him better on people than on machines.

Your cover was the usual polychrome mess. I always fold the mag when I buy it so the druggist can just see the price. Don't want him to go blind, you know. After all, you can't compete with the true detective mags in purveying sex, rape and assault, so why not try an adult cover on the mag. Others in the field do and manage to sell.

McCain's letter was typical of the better class of letters published during the Sgt. Saturn era. Some of the juvenile witticisms you used to publish would turn a strong stomach.

Although your letter section is a trifle long I always find it interesting. Your comments, both acid and humorous, are also good.

And so, after the vitriol I have poured upon you, a bouquet is due you. The mag has greatly improved since it came under your capable direction and it is still improving. I look forward to seeing your new type of cover. You now rank at the top of the field. Keep up the good work.—406 Genesee St., Storm Lake, Iowa.

You pulled the switch just as the maw of the

waste-basket threatened, Don—in the proverbial niche of time as one janitor of our past acquaintance used to call it. He was the same man who had close competitors always running “nick and tuck.” We were fond of him once, alas.

We disagree vehemently on St. Clair and let it stand there—save that we hope to have more Oona and Jicks soon. We miss them. There are in those stories a great deal more than you have been able to dig out of them. And the interplay of more-or-less commonplace human reaction to situations still far ahead in the future has always fascinated us above all else in stf.

Glad you liked Harness' misshapen posterior and hope you feel likewise about our current covers. Drop us another line when your bile runs high.

SUMUP

by Albert J. Lewis

Dear Editor: Having finished the December issue of TWS I would like to make a few comments concerning the year as a whole for both SS and TWS. First of all, although there were no stories of such outstanding caliber as “Flight into Yesterday” the general average of stories was somewhat superior to that of 1949. The best issue was the August Thrilling Wonder, the worst the March Startling. Except for these two departures from the norm the quality was remarkably even throughout.

And now the stories on their individual merit—the top four can be rated as Superior, the others as Good.

1. **New Bodies for Old**—Jack Vance has here produced his finest effort to date. It was an old idea but handled in such a refreshing manner that it seemed completely new. It is easily the best rejuvenation story yet.

2. **The New Reality**—Charles L. Harness. This is far and away the most intriguing concept story since Padgett's **Fairy Chessmen**. It showed certain traces of brilliance and the only reason that it is not heading the list by a mile and a half is the very definite let-down after the wonderfully original first nine-tenths. If this story should ever see book publication, I hope Mr. Harness will revise the ending out of all recognition. The story certainly deserves it.

3. **The Cybernetic Brains**—Raymond F. Jones. This is the third best story Jones has written (*Renaissance* and *Fifty Million Monkeys* were the top two) and why it does not rate higher is somewhat hard to define. Perhaps it is due to the gross stupidity of the hero, who allowed himself to be manipulated as he did. Perhaps it is because the hero failed to make full use of his resources. At any rate the hero is at fault.

4. **Road Block**—Robert Moore Williams. Here is an almost flawless little short that, like the preceding two, does not deserve to play second fiddle to anybody. Nevertheless the three stories that should have beaten Mr. Vance's tale, when broken down piece by piece, fail to do so in total effect and so these three stories take first three places by a nose.

[Turn page]

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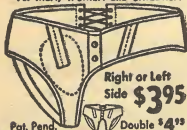
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The stories in the second grouping are merely good.
 5. **Sunday Is Three Thousand Years Away**—R. F. Jones. The last of the story was the best. It should have been further developed.

6. **The Shadow Men**—A. E. van Vogt. This was definitely inferior w—nevertheless a good story.

7. **There Shall Be No Darkness**—James Blish. An excellent fantasy. Unfortunately I prefer Science Fiction.

8. **The Weariest River**—Wallace West. I never seem to tire of this sort of thing.

9. **As You Were**—Henry Kuttner. A good theme but handled somewhat less adequately than it deserved.

10. **Summer Wear**—de Camp. L. Sprague has written only two good shorts since the war. This is one of them.

Then comes a long list of honorable mentions, ranging from Good to Fair, including: "City at World's End" and "The Return of Captain Future" by Hamilton; "Journey for Seven" and "Wine of the Dreamers" by MacDonald; "Citadel of Lost Ages" by Brackett; "Voice of the Lobster," "Roman Holiday" and "The Energy Eaters" by Kuttner and Barnes; the Space Salvage stories by Cleve Cartmill; "Carnival of Madness" by Bradbury; "The Black Ewe" by Lieber; "Appointment in New Utrecht" by Lee; and "Robot Nemesis" by E. E. Smith. The failure of this last is due to the fact that Smith is at home only in an epic. A novel is somewhat confining and this novelet very definitely cramped its style.

I guess that's all, except to say that the only really bad story was "The Lady Is a Witch," and to reiterate the time-honored and perennially unheeded plea for trimmed edges and abandonment of the eternal Fem-B. E. M.—Hero triangle on the cover—Ricketts House, California Institute of Technology, Pasadena 4, Calif.

Trimmed edges would at the present time be impractical from a production standpoint. As for the covers, we're doing the best we can, as is Fra Bergey.

Thanks for the summing up, Mr. Lewis. Curiously enough, we agree with you on the whole. 1950 was a good solid year but not a great one. No AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT or WHAT MAD UNIVERSE or AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT or THE DARK WORLD to give it that extra something. Well, 1951 is packing plenty of promise both for SS and TWS. Let's hope it proves the all-time topper. Which brings sign-off time around once more. Wot—no poetry?

—THE EDITOR.

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The FRYING PAN



A Fanzine Commentary

CHARLES STUART, in an article called **TABOO** which appears in the second issue of the fanzine entitled somewhat ambiguously **ALEPH-NUL**, published bi-monthly by Bill Venable, 32 Park Place, R.D. #4, Pittsburgh 9, Pennsylvania, tees off on the use or rather non-use of sex in stf. He leads with the following paragraphs—

The forbidden subject of science fiction is sex. Sex may not be used as the basis for motivation in any stf story, and if it is referred to at all, a mere passing comment on its existence will suffice. Quoth the editor. "Nothing more!"

In a recent speech in San Francisco, Anthony Boucher remarked that sex alone was a taboo subject in the fantasy field—the same field in which all restrictions limiting the author's wildest ravings on such controversial topic as politics, religion and sociological themes were non-existent.

Why the present day editorial ban on more sex stories in fantasy? The line of research leads us into the past, a past in which sex *was* used and abused in such a way as to bring on the censorship of the postal authorities.

Mr. Stuart then delves into the ecdysiast techniques of the past which resulted in the alleged taboo, then cites examples which have crossed it, chiefly the works of Thorne Smith, and gives nods in passing to some of the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs and Margaret St. Clair. He concludes—

Sex in science fiction and fantasy has once more reared its head. Its future course will be an uphill battle against the past, and only the enthusiastic support of fans in their letters to the editor can make sex science fiction a legitimate theme. If the

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stories to come follow the Smithian and St. Clair modes of treatment, sex will be here to stay.

If not: then the postal inspector cometh.

Okay, say we. Disregarding the fact that Mr. Stuart's article manages, snake-fashion, to devour its own tail, first denying sex to stf and then admitting its presence, let us look into the matter.

We have never been aware of any sex taboos in stf—save of course those that passed the barrier of reasonably good taste. Actually science fiction has always been concerned with such a vast number of things that an over-emphasis upon sex—insistence upon it in every story in large quantities—would be as bigoted and absurd as demanding that all the tales we published should base their motivation upon, say, the binomial theorem or perhaps the fact that most humans have hair.

Furthermore, sex is present, although not necessarily as an overt motivating force, in a large percentage of science fiction stories today. Certainly in the February issue of TWS, which we have at hand, it plays a major role in Emmett McDowell's short novel—I, THE UNMORTAL—and is not ignored in the Jack Vance lead story—OVERLORDS OF MAXUS.

It was prominent, although hardly in a pornographic sense, in Sprague's TIME TRACK in the January SS and was decidedly if somewhat psychiatrically present in Charley Harness' THE NEW REALITY in the December TWS. The romantic love theme—a sex sublimation—was a vital factor in Jack Vance's THE FIVE GOLD BANDS, lead novel for the November SS, and sexual attraction played prominent parts in all three of the lead stories for the October TWS.

Certainly, in our culture if in virtually no others, it is impossible to divorce the theme of romantic love from sex, especially if physical attraction is treated frankly—as it is, we hope, in the stories we publish. For without sex none of us would be here to argue about it—and likewise without it we doubt very much if science fiction would be around.

Sex is perhaps the most important factor in the greatest “miracle” of science, the miracle of life itself—and as such it belongs quite properly in stf. Not pornographically, of course, nor in any form calculated to give postal inspectors fits. But it belongs and has always been among those present as it should.

So where, we wonder, does Mr. Stuart come by his “taboo”? If by sex he means smoking

room fumes he must look for it elsewhere. But if he means frank facing of the facts of life as visualized by authors writing of this or alien worlds, then he must be blind to have missed it. For it is, as it has always been, present—openly, subtly, uproariously, romantically, satirically—in virtually every one of its myriad forms.

Sometimes, we feel impelled to inform Mr. Stuart, it is not always as openly apparent as he would have it. But it is there, as it must be if the stories we print are to contain any sort of human conviction or emotional appeal. So be it!

—THE EDITOR.

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK REVIEW

A GNOME THERE WAS (and other tales) by Lewis Padgett, Simon and Schuster, New York (\$2.50).

Our one personal query upon receiving and reading this fine collection of Lewis Padgett stories—why hadn't it been done sooner? To which we can only add that we hope the reception and sale of this volume will result in another selected from the same source.

For, over the past ten to fifteen years, the ubiquitous Mr. Padgett-Kuttner-O'Donnell-Hastings-Hammond-Liddell et cetera has written scores of brilliant science fantasy stories and novelets (to say nothing of his longer efforts, to date barely touched by book publishers) whose qualities and notions have been as varied as they have been superb.

But at any rate the Messrs Simon and Schuster have made a start—and they have selected wisely and well from the vast backlog of stories placed at their disposal by the author of the many names. They range all the way in subject matter from the pure fairy-tale fantasy of the title tale, through the neo-classic *Minsky Were the Borogroves* to the fantastic pseudo-scientific exploits of the uproarious and thoroughly radioactive hill-billy Hogbens, which last first saw print in this magazine.

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ing fantasy, scientific ingenuity and humor of the sort that has become known as Charles Addams in this volume—and all we can tell you further is to get hold of it and read it from cover to cover.

COSMIC ENGINEERS by Clifford D. Simak, Gnome Press, New York (\$2.50).

A group of young space-patrolmen from Earth, assigned to investigate some unauthorized dideos on Pluto, encounter a derelict which has been floating in the System for some hundred centuries—and on it they find a young woman who, exiled lest her scientific discoveries destroy the social balance of her original time, has maintained herself in a state of physical deep-freeze but mental alertness.

Hence she has been able to attain a rapport with undreamed-of forces at work in the universe and, restored to life by the patrolmen, rearranges their plans in a vitally needed trip to the planet of the Engineers, whose purpose is to keep the galaxy alive.

At the moment it is threatened, not only by the insane attacks of the Hellhounds—bent only on the Engineers' destruction—but by imminent collision with another galaxy. All in all a nice set of minor problems for our heroes to solve.

This is a story in the antique sf pattern, well executed and exciting in its fashion. Characterization and dialogue are always held secondary to the perils set up by the author—perils which must be and are invariably solved by his protagonists. Our one beef at this type of story is the fact that these appalling problems will always be satisfactorily unraveled—which makes them, in a very real sense, mere straw men, created for their own erasure.

But of its type it is a rattling good yarn.

THE COMETEERS by Jack Williamson, Fantasy Press, Reading, Pennsylvania (\$3.00).

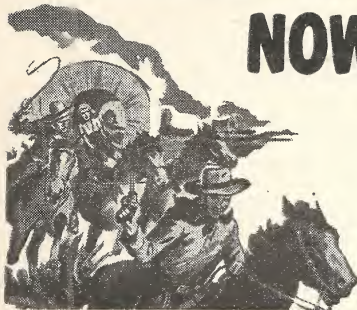
This is another tale of the same genre as the above—with the Legion of Space, manned by its familiar characters, being beset by another straw menace in the shape of the title rolegsters.

It contains a short-novel self-sequel entitled **ONE AGAINST THE LEGION**, which finds the boys—Giles Habibula, Jay Kalan, Hal Samdu and a few additions battling a renegade Legionnaire. And battling, needless to say, with ultimate success. Not quite as sweeping or imaginative as *Cosmic Engineers* but cut from the same slice of stardust. If you like this sort of thing it should be your dish.

—THE EDITOR.

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